The Prodigal Pro Tem

Frederick Orin Bartlett

Edith M. Moore

THE PRODIGAL PRO TEM

"I am to do the library. The servants are all busy."
"There is nothing like giving the servants a great deal of work," he declared enthusiastically.

See page 147

THE
PRODIGAL PRO TEM

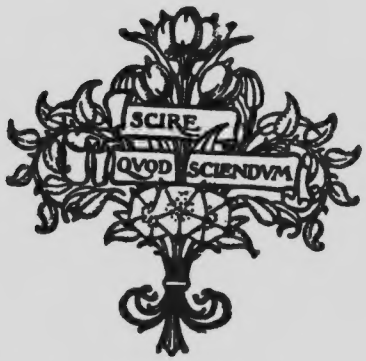
BY

FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT

Author of "The Seventh Noon," "The Web of the Golden Spider," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

HOWARD CHANDLER CHRISTY



TORONTO
McLEOD & ALLEN
PUBLISHERS

COPYRIGHT, 1910
By Small, Maynard & Company
(INCORPORATED)

Entered at Stationers' Hall

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

0000192

TO

DAN

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I	Barnes — the Preposterous . . .	13
II	The Courtesy of the Road	30
III	Dreams for the Old	39
IV	Questions of Diplomacy	51
V	Three Fingered Bill	63
VI	The Mystery of a Vision	74
VII	The Call of the Road	83
VIII	An Estimable Young Man	94
IX	A Lullaby	105
X	On Trout Fishing and Bow-Knots	116
XI	On Adventuring	128
XII	Strategy and Geography	139
XIII	A Surprise	151
XIV	Outside the Dutch Door	163
XV	Playing the Game	176
XVI	John gives his Notice	192
XVII	The Road complicates Matters . .	206
XVIII	What makes a Prodigal	219
XIX	Barnes learns a Great Truth . .	231
XX	So does his Mother	242

		PAGE
XXI	An Old Prodigal comes Home . .	251
XXII	The Blind See	262
XXIII	A Young Prodigal comes Home . .	276
XXIV	Man to Man	287
XXV	The Purple Rim	296
XXVI	Aunt Philomela Gambles	306
XXVII	In which Everyone learns Something	319

PAGE
251
262
276
87
96
06
19

THE PRODIGAL PRO TEM

THE
PRODIGAL PRO TEM

CHAPTER I

BARNES — THE PREPOSTEROUS

If Barnes had been asked to define the one thing lacking in the scene before him, he would probably have answered sentimentally, "A woman---a young and very fair woman," not that he had a definite figure in mind, but simply because from an artist's view point the picture, wonderful as it was, seemed now like a marvelous setting without its jewel.

A light breeze from the West, heavy with summer incense, wafted through a golden-moted silence and across a turquoise sky cotton-blossom clouds. Dense, yet of gossamer fineness; massive, yet light as thistledown, they took their course placidly without disturbing the perfect serenity of their background. In their constant changing, they appeared at times like Spanish galleons with every full-bellied sail straining at its ropes. But they cut no churning path; they left no oily wake. They

only cast calm shadows which in their turn swept majestically over the green valley below them. The heavy-leaved trees, the fat grasses, the daisies and roadside ferns found themselves first in the stark sunlight, then in the quiet shade, then in the brazen sun again.

If Barnes had not been in tune with it all, he would have felt out of place here on the top of the long hill up which he had just climbed by the saffron road. As it was, he surveyed the scene with an air of easy content. To a passer-by he might have given the impression of being a large proprietor. In his heavy walking-boots, his belted trousers, his flannel shirt gathered in at the throat with a light tie, his checked English cap, and his walking-stick, he looked as though he might be making a walking tour of his landed estates. He had a comfortable air of princely sovereignty. His even features, his tall erect frame, his gray-blue eyes, and above all his thin, straight nose carried out the illusion. He had an air more of Bavaria than New England. But his firm lips, surmounted by a bristling blonde mustache, trimmed short and in a straight line, together with his Saxon hair, marked him of a hardier race. He might have been a Dane, but his cheek bones were too high for that, and there was too much good humor written large

about the mouth. As a matter of fact he was from New York state and his ancestors had fought under Schuyler. His great grandfather was quoted as having said, "I 'd rather be killed as a private under Schuyler than live, a captain, under Gates." A sentiment his father had paraphrased when he raged at the walking delegate who tried to unionize his shops, "I 'll go broke by myself before I 'll get rich under you." From that day Barnes, Sr., had moved from one apartment house to another in New York city in a steady crescendo of advancing rentals until now he needed a secretary to look after the tipping stone. And "The Acme Manufacturing Co." was wrought in iron scrolls across the oven doors of half the cook-stoves in the United States.

This fact, however, had less to do with Barnes to-day than the more romantic one that his father in the days of beginnings, married his book-keeper, a fine-souled English girl, niece of the late Lord Dunnington. Her father, a younger son, came to America to make his fortune, died soon after, and left the girl penniless. To-day the one romantic spot left in Barnes, Sr., was his ambition to accumulate a fortune so vast that it might overawe his caddish English relatives. It was the mother in Barnes, Jr., and not the father who now stood

upon the top of the hills dreaming into the cotton-blossom clouds.

His pose was misleading. Barnes was proprietor of nothing but himself. That was much or little as you happened to feel about it To himself it was enough to make him glad that he stood here to-day even with only a trifle over ten round dollars to his name. The position was of his own choosing. He might have been secretary to the Acme Manufacturing Co. had he wished, instead of a painter of very good water-colors which as yet, however, had not found so ready a market as the cook-stoves.

The father put it bluntly when he declared, "People must eat to live; they can worry along without pictures." Perhaps. But he could n't. He could worry along better without cook-stoves, as he was proving.

But when a gay shaded patch of blue seen through the straggling cloud-mist made him think of his mother's wet eyes as they were when in something of a temper he had quit the gorgeous apartment house for good, it occurred to him that his father might have been less irascible about the matter. The man had some grounds for temper to be sure. In college Barnes had devoted himself to Fine Arts and similar subjects when the elder,

not recognizing the courses as expressed in the University cipher code, had thought him working assiduously at economics and other useful branches of manufacturing. Then, too, instead of studying the market conditions of Europe when abroad, he had used the opportunity for living a bit in the Latin quarter and visiting the galleries. He reported home that so far as he could see, people over there had to have pictures; they could worry along without cook-stoves. But even so, he could n't stand being browbeaten like an errant schoolboy, and therefore when matters came to a crisis he packed up his sketch-book and started on a jaunt through the Catskills, where Rip Van Winkle had found surcease before him.

Below him stretched acre after acre of farm lands made rich by three generations of toilers. Gray stone walls told bluntly what the task had been. They gave the scene a history such as crumbling castle walls lend to English landscapes. The farms swept down a valley cut by a lazy lowland stream, which looked as though it might furnish good trout fishing. He turned to the left and saw through the birches bordering the road what he had not before noticed — a red brick house half hidden behind a row of elms. Just above, a wagon track led to it. He took a position where he could

see the house more in detail. He caught a glimpse of a white-pillared porch and a Dutch door, the upper part swung open. The brass handle shone brightly in the sunshine. To the left there was a capacious barn with chickens scratching industriously before the open door. From somewhere came the coppery tinkle of homing cows. It looked like a place where for the asking one could get milk and honey and good rye bread.

The rural free delivery carrier jogged up the hill and, stopping to drop some mail in a letter-box out of sight behind the hedge, nodded a cheery "Howdy" to Barnes and jogged on again. This man in his officious Federal uniform destroyed something of the sleepy atmosphere of the place. "Here I am," he seemed to declare as boisterously as the circular letters of the Acme Manufacturing Co. "Here I am, dear sir or madame, and beg to remain most respectfully yours, the United States of America."

Barnes, who had opened his portfolio with an idea of sketching the spot, closed it again, tying it in one of those hard knots which invariably in the end he had to cut. But he was checked by a sound from the direction of the letter-box. At first he thought it was a distant whip-poor-will. It was low and had the same note of subdued pathos.

Then he concluded that it was a straggling brook running with gentle sobbing among the ferns. But the peculiar sound soon became more individualized. It took on a human note; then a feminine. Finally he awoke to the fact that it was nothing else but the sobbing of a woman. He strode up the grass-grown road to the hidden stretch beyond the fringe of trees. There he found himself confronting a young woman who was kneeling upon the grass, bowed above an open letter in her lap.

She was not over twenty, but tall and lithe. Her heavy hair, black and silken, lay coiled about her head in heavy braids. She was dressed in white with a collar of exquisite lace fastened at her throat with a turquoise pendant. A great orange-colored cat arched its back in apparent sympathy against her skirt. The soft grass had muffled his approach so that for a moment she was unaware that she was not alone.

"I beg your pardon," he apologized, hat in hand, now not at all sure that he ought to be here.

She was upon her feet in an instant. She looked as though about to run. The cat challenged him with a little spit.

"I didn't know," he hastened to explain, "but what you had met with an accident."

She looked whole enough. He surmised that

the letter was the cause of her agitation. If so, he certainly was intruding. Her black eyes, full, Italian, swept by long lashes, seemed to tell him so.

"No," she murmured, "it is nothing; just bad news. It came so unexpectedly."

Her lips moved rythmically to the music of a sweetly lyrical voice. Her teeth were as white as those of the orange colored cat. She fitted marvelously well into the scene above the valley. Consequently he parried a little to prolong an interview to which he knew he had no right.

"Luckily, bad news generally does come unexpectedly," he said.

She flashed a look at him as though to fathom his intent. Then she glanced swiftly towards the brick house and seemed instantly in her grief to forget that he was there.

"It will kill him," she exclaimed below her breath.

Still he hesitated, impressed by the weight of her sorrow.

"If I may be of any service," he ventured, "I 'm on my way to the next village. Any letter or wire —"

She looked up.

"No! No! Such news travels only too quickly," she answered. Her brows contracted. She went

on more to herself than to him, "If I could only check it before it reaches him."

"He," mused Barnes, is at once the most personal and impersonal of pronouns. Next to "She" it is the most pregnant with possibilities of all human utterances.

He wondered, too, how it would be possible to paint a black that had gold in it; an ivory that had rose in it; a pure white that had blue in it. It was not possible. And yet there they were in her hair, her brow, and the setting of her pupils. The tawny cat pressed close to her skirt.

"Then I fear," he said half in apology, half in hope, as he prepared to leave, "that I can't help you. And yet," he reflected aloud, "it seems as though when ill fortune hits hard at anyone the rest of the world ought to club in to help. There ought to be a bad news insurance."

Her face brightened. But instantly it clouded again as she turned half away.

"But instead of that," he went on, "the world only raises barriers."

She recognized his implied offer of help. If her instinct bade her turn from it, there was something in his sturdy presence, above all in his frank eyes, which made him seem to stand for just some such kind-hearted insurance as he had whimsically sug-

gested. It was possible that he from his impersonal point of view might be able to see more clearly than she just what in such a crisis as hers was wisest. At any rate, she said,

"It 's about my brother. He won't come home."

Barnes suppressed a smile. He had been prepared for sudden death. He shifted his eyes from her to the brick house now growing more mellow in the softening twilight.

"That is his home?" he asked.

She nodded, watching him curiously.

"I should think a man ought to be eager to return to such a home as that," he said.

"He ran away," she explained with some embarrassment at expressing the more intimate details. "He is somewhere in Alaska."

Barnes acknowledged her confidence with a sympathetic nod of his head.

"If he is in Alaska," he suggested, "it will be only a matter of time."

"That is just the trouble," she exclaimed impulsively. "That is the pity of it. It will be too late!"

He saw that the boy himself was a mere episode in some more poignant grief. He waited for her to proceed. She said,

"I don't know why I should tell you this — ex-

cept that it's a relief to tell anyone. Father is up there waiting for him — with not long to live. If he hears this — his heart — "

Her fingers closed convulsively over the letter.

"That *is* tough," he murmured. "Your father expected to see the boy himself to-day?"

"Not to see him, but to hear him, to feel him. Father is blind."

"That's still worse. The boy knows of his trouble?"

She nodded.

"Then why won't he come?"

"Because of a quarrel. He wrote this."

She handed the letter to Barnes with a quick motion as though in sudden hope that he might be able to gather from it something she herself had missed. He glanced it through. It was a thoughtless letter. Its whole tone was one of boyish bravado. Barnes flushed as he read it.

"What the boy seems to need," he commented, "is a cowhiding."

"I'm afraid he has fallen into bad company," she apologized for him, but none too heartily.

He checked his own opinion.

"Joe seems almost like a stranger to me," she confided further. "He has been gone five years

now. And the last few years he *was* at home, I was away at school."

Barnes refrained from congratulating her. He realized how really serious an affair she had upon her hands.

"And you — you must tell your father this yourself?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, "and it's like being ordered to kill him."

She drew in a deep breath that was half a gasp.

Barnes thought a moment.

"The first thing I should do," he advised, "would be to tear up the letter."

"You mean —?"

"I should never let him see that."

She hesitated a moment and then still half dazed tore it into little bits. She tossed the fragments to the ground. They were harried about the greensward by a light sunset breeze. The yellow cat began to play with them.

"Now," he advised, "I should n't tell your father anything."

"But he expected Joe to-day! That would leave him to wait."

"Is n't that better?" he asked.

"Ah," she exclaimed, "the blind wait so hard. There is nothing else for them."

"But they suffer hard, too. While waiting he could at least — hope."

She shook her head quickly.

"He would guess."

"A guess is never a certainty," he persisted.

"It would be certainty enough to break down his poor heart. Dr. Merriweather said that Joe alone could keep him with us another week."

Barnes glanced again at the brick house. It scarcely seemed possible that so grim a crisis as this could center there. The situation struck home. In some way he felt the responsibility of this unknown young man's action resting upon his own shoulders. He, too, in a fit of anger had left a father behind him.

At that moment Barnes was inspired by an idea — a preposterous idea to be sure, but the present situation was preposterous and so was Barnes himself if his father was to be believed. Furthermore most inspired ideas *are* preposterous. It depends a good deal on how they turn out whether or not that adjective clings to them forever. But this one made even Barnes catch his breath. He had to look again at the blue sky, at the gold in her hair, at her eyes now misted like Loch Lomond at dawn.

"There is just one other course for us," he announced deliberately. "We might deceive him."

She started back.

"I don't understand."

"How many up there must know of this?" he inquired.

"There is only Aunt Philomela," she managed to answer.

"The servants?"

"They have heard of Joe but never seen him."

"The neighborhood?"

"We moved here after Joe left."

She answered his questions mechanically with no suspicion as to what he was leading.

"The boy was young? You say this was five years ago?"

"Yes. Yes."

"A lad changes a good deal in that time. Do I resemble him — even remotely?"

"You?"

She studied him again as though for the first time she had seen him.

"Joe," she faltered, "must be now — about your height."

"That 's enough. A grown man may change in every way except in height."

"But —"

"There is only a week or so. I am free. Why could n't I play the son? Why," he smiled at

the odd whirligig, "why could n't I play the prodigal?"

She started back, her hands clasped to her breast, her eyes grown big.

"How impossible!" she exclaimed.

"And humane," he suggested.

The word caught her attention.

"It would be almost that," she admitted reluctantly.

He waited. He did not care to press the point by argument. It was merely a suggestion born of the moment — born of the acute necessity of doing something at once. But she must decide for herself. He had done his best, and however it turned this picture was worth remembering.

At first it did not seem to her even a possibility, but once she recovered a little from the shock of her surprise, once she had stripped it of its novelty, and, gazing into his honest eyes, considered it merely as an heroic measure for easing the sick, blind man to his end, she found herself forgetting everything else but the peace it might bring. She, better than he, knew that it *was* possible.

"But," she exclaimed, "it is such a bit of trickery."

"Nothing else," he assured her, "or diplomacy if you wish to dignify it."

"If — if we succeeded it would make his last days very pleasant."

"I would do my best."

"But it is such an obligation — "

"Let me represent the world at its finest. Let me found the bad news insurance company."

"Surely you can't afford to sacrifice so much time."

"I 'll paint a picture or two. I shall be more than repaid."

"You 're an artist!" she exclaimed as though that might account for many hitherto inexplicable matters.

"I 'm striving to deserve that title," he admitted.

Her head was awhirl with the quick sequence of unexpected events. But in the midst of it she still grasped at this hope.

"Would you," she gasped, "be good enough to meet my aunt?"

"It will be a pleasure."

"She is very quick tempered," she explained, "so you need n't pay much attention to her."

"That is the distinct advantage of quick-tempered relatives," he affirmed.

"You will come now?"

"Yes," he agreed readily. "And — it may be helpful — my name is Barnes."

She shot a swift half-frightened smile at him. "And I am Miss Van Patten."

He bowed.

She led the way to the house, the yellow cat by her side.

CHAPTER II

THE COURTESY OF THE ROAD

The little old lady sitting by the window in the big living-room, as serene as Whistler's portrait of his mother, may have had a temper but if so, thought Barnes as he entered at the girl's heels, it was concealed somewhere about her person other than in her face. She was in black with a white cap sitting as daintily light on her gray hair as the first flick of snow on a silver fir. She was a tiny body with shrewd black eyes and a firm thin mouth. Her wrinkled cheeks still had color. She was busy with a wisp of lace.

"Aunt Philomela, this is Mr. Barnes."

The girl spoke the sentence as though it were one word. Aunt Philomela snapped up her head and leveled her astonished black eyes upon a young and decidedly good-looking stranger who was bowing low. Then she shot them at the girl who had turned towards him she had so abruptly introduced.

"I have been thrust so rather forcibly into the honor of your acquaintance," murmured Barnes, "in the hope that I may be of some service."

As he observed the lightning flashes beginning to cut the dark of her eyes, Barnes suspected that she had already found in the hidden depths of them, the missing temper. The formal courtliness of his introductory speech baffled her for a moment, but now she observed in a sharp staccato,

"Perhaps my niece will explain where she had the honor of meeting Mr. Barnes."

"By the hedge," answered Barnes, assuming the burden of the reply, "just by the letter-box."

"And she is indebted —"

"To Chance and the courtesy of the road."

"And the service you propose?" continued the little old lady, clearly still bewildered. "A set of books, perhaps?"

It was evident that her wits were still keen.

"No," answered Barnes, unruffled. He could blame his portfolio for that accusation. "No, though it's a matter requiring equal tact if that is possible."

The aunt, with a queenly nod of her white head towards a chair, graciously gave him permission to be seated, though the red in her cheeks was heightening ominously. Barnes surmising that she was struggling hard not to sacrifice her present advantageous position to a quick tongue, resolved to put the matter bluntly while yet there was time.

"Your niece has just received a letter from your nephew. He writes that he will not come home."

"My niece confided this personal affair in you?"

He bowed.

"Eleanor," she demanded, "is this true?"

"That Joe refuses to come home? It is brutally true, Aunt."

The girl had turned her aunt's hasty slur neatly. Barnes met her eyes with understanding. As in Miss Van Patten's case, the grim fact was sufficient to divert the aunt's attention from everything else.

"He refuses to come back at such a time?" she repeated. "This is terrible!"

There was silence for a moment, and then she added,

"But this will break his heart!"

She glanced excitedly from one to the other of them. The girl crept to her side.

"It will. It will if he learns of it. But he must n't."

"Must n't, Eleanor? What other way is there?"

"Mr. Barnes —" began the girl.

The aunt glanced swiftly at the stranger again. He met her eyes steadily — with perhaps the slightest, the very slightest, gallant lowering of them in respectful deference to her age.

"I fail to see how a stranger may assist in so personal a matter," she observed icily.

"If you will let me explain," said Barnes. "It seems to me that no one but a stranger can help. I 've ventured to suggest that I be allowed to ward off the blow; that I be allowed to do this in the only possible way now open — by impersonating the boy."

The girl straightened herself and waited. Barnes put down his portfolio and accepted the chair which had lately been offered him. Aunt Philomela sat up as stiffly as though suddenly galvanized.

"You — you actually seriously propose such — such base trickery?" she stammered.

"With the most honest intentions in the world," nodded Barnes.

"You are bold and impertinent, sir!"

"Still with the best intentions in the world."

"That does not excuse such knavery," she protested.

The girl broke in,

"Aunt, if you 'll calm yourself and listen a moment. You are unkind to one who has made so generous an offer — "

"Bah," interrupted Aunt Philomela, "it is too generous."

Barnes made no reply.

"I must ask Mr. —"

"Barnes," he supplied as she hesitated.

"To withdraw at once."

Barnes accepted the decision with equanimity. He reached for his portfolio. But he was beginning to like this little old lady.

The girl checked him with a spirit that was authoritative.

"Would you be good enough to wait a moment," she requested, "until — until aunt goes upstairs and tells father?"

She turned to her aunt.

"Aunty," she went on, "you must tell father that Joe refuses to come. You must tell him that Joe is brutal about it. You may tell him that there is no longer any need of his waiting."

Aunt Philomela quailed.

"Where is the letter?" she demanded feebly.

"I tore it up. It was n't suitable for you to read."

Barnes leaned forward towards the little form which had settled back wearily into the chair. His eyes were tender and sympathetic but there was nothing obtrusive in his attitude.

"Believe me," he said gently, "I am sorry for you and would do what I can. If what I proposed sounds absurd at first, you see that the only other

alternative is cruel. If we can make the end come peacefully and quietly, won't it justify us somewhat?"

"But why should you, a stranger —" Aunt Philomela began suspiciously.

"I don't blame you for your doubts," he answered. "But at such moments as these, who are the strangers? I would help an old man who was bruised by the roadside; why not an old man who lies bruised in his bed?"

"Who are you?" she demanded.

Barnes smiled.

"Ask your cook. I 'm the son of the Acme Manufacturing Co."

The aunt for a moment doubted his sanity.

"Also," he added, "I paint water-colors — some of them good, some of them indifferent, all of them as well done as I know how to make them."

"And you came here?" stammered Aunt Philomela, still confused.

"To escape New York. Also for a bit of walking trip to make sketches. For what else — God knows. Perhaps for this."

Aunt Philomela studied him shrewdly and in spite of herself his mouth started a twinkle in her eyes.

"The whole idea," she declared, "is absurd."

"The whole situation," he returned, "is pitiful."

"Oh," moaned Miss Van Patten, "it is. We have no right to stop at anything which shall bring him relief."

"We have no right to shirk our duty," returned the aunt with conviction.

"Duty?" queried the girl. "Is it our duty to let father suffer?"

"It is our duty to bear our own burdens and not shift them upon strangers."

"I see no burden whatever in the undertaking," corrected Barnes.

"Why don't you?" challenged the aunt.

That *was* a question. Why was he willing to leave the pleasant freedom of the open road for a task which could not be called in itself pleasurable? The question was even more involved than the shrewd aunt suspected, when the fact was taken into account that he was even willing to act the prodigal — a character for which he had a particular aversion. To his mind the only decent way for the prodigal to return was with the fatted calf over his own shoulders. He must return triumphant, even if repentant. Otherwise it behooved him to stay away in the far country he had chosen and take his medicine like a man. To be sure the present case justified itself, but even so he did not altogether like the flavor of it. Then why was this no burden? It was clearly sim-

ply a case of atmosphere. The house itself had something to do with it, the gold in the girl's hair had something, so did the little old aunt herself with the pink in her crinkly cheeks. He turned from the aunt to the niece. Decidedly, he thought, she should be painted on ivory.

"Why don't you?" repeated the aunt, pressing home her point.

He glanced out of the window. The West was donning her jewels; pearl, opal, and amethyst.

"Because," he answered, "the day is very fair."

"We are indebted then to the sun?"

He avoided the obvious pun and nodded.

"To the sun, the month, the time of day, and — a slight matter of temperament."

The girl lifted her eyes to his with a smile. The aunt did not repeat again her salient question; instead she frowned.

"I have my two eyes," she answered enigmatically.

"The world is your debtor," murmured Barnes, chivalrously.

"Aunty, you ought to think of nothing but father," broke in the girl. "He will soon wake up in the dark with the old question on his lips."

There came to them even then the silvery tinkle of a bell from upstairs.

"Oh, dear," gasped Aunt Philomela.

Her niece stood squarely before her.

"There 's no more time for argument," she said. "We must decide now at once. Either we must accept Mr. Barnes' offer or — you must go up to father."

"Oh, dear," gasped Aunt Philomela.

"Are you going to him, Aunt?" demanded the girl.

"Oh, dear no," she trembled. "It quite puts me out of breath to think of it.

"Then —?"

"Do you think it possible that he can be deceived like this?" she asked.

Barnes arose.

"We can only try. It looks in our favor."

There was a pause.

"Then?" inquired Barnes, directly.

"Go," she replied. "Go quickly."

Which, though ambiguous, decided the matter. Barnes left the room, following the girl who, quite as out of breath as her aunt, led the way.

CHAPTER III

DREAMS OF THE OLD

They had no sooner reached the head of the stairs than a second tinkle came rippling fairy-like the length of the white-finished hall from a room at the end facing the West. Miss Van Patten paused. But the orange-colored cat preceded them and stepped daintily over the sill.

"Shall we follow her Highness?" whispered Barnes.

The girl shrank back a little.

"If we fail?" she gasped.

"Then," answered Barnes, "there'll be nothing left but to explain."

"Would he ever forgive us? Would he ever trust us again?"

"That comes later," he reminded her. "We haven't failed yet."

"So much depends upon you!"

"Much more depends upon him. If his hunger for the boy is great enough, he will forget everything but the fact that he has at last something tangible — something to grasp."

Again her eyes grew big as she studied him with the feeling that not until this very moment had she ever seen him before. Here in the intimacy of the upper chambers the boldness of the ac. oppressed her. Before, it ha' seemed only a theory, but now it became an actuality. He himself felt it. It would have taken little to have turned him back. But at this moment the orange-colored cat returned for them. Then the father called. Time was pressing. She took the lead but Barnes with a quicker pace stepped ahead of her.

At the door, he paused. He saw a large room bathed in the glow of the setting sun. In one corner stood a large four-posted bed. The white counterpane stood out like a snow-sheeted pool among evergreens. Bolstered up with fat pillows he saw a face that would have served for a model of a saint's. He had but a second to study it and make his decision, but that was time enough. It was a child's face grown old. White-bearded though it was, it was still a child's face. All the man-fret was smoothed out of it, all the world marks rubbed away. He seemed more like a son lying there than a father. His eyes were closed and one thin arm lay outside the clothes by his side. His face was turned towards the door. The cat leaped upon the counterpane and instantly the father raised his head.

"Eleanor?" he called.

Barnes strode to his side as the cry escaped. He placed a strong hand upon the thin arm. The eyes though they remained closed seemed to strain in that direction. The lips moved.

"My son!" he trembled.

Barnes bowed his head. That was a cry to go to a man's heart. He could not answer it. He felt the gentle fingers play up his arm to his hair. He felt them flutter over his forehead, his cheeks, his chin. Then, kneeling, he waited for the second cry. It came charged with such feeling as to bring a strain to his throat.

"My son!"

There was no doubt in it. It was a wild, glad, embracing sob. It was the utterance of an empty heart suddenly filled. He was breathing rapidly from the excitement, but he freed his other hand and with the two clung almost fiercely to the boy's arm.

"You 've come back," he whispered.

"Yes," answered Barnes, finding his voice, "I 've come back."

The voice for a second seemed to startle the old man. His hold relaxed. The girl who had crept to the other side of him raised her head with her eyes fixed on Barnes, scarcely breathing. The old man's

eyelids fluttered as though he were straining to force them open.

"I 've come back," repeated Barnes.

"I can feel you, but your voice — Oh, it 's enough now that I can feel you! I 've often heard your voice, lying here but — but my hands were always empty."

The girl breathed again. Barnes met her eyes. He nodded encouragement. It was as he had thought; the fact of a living tangible presence here was enough to dispel all minor doubts.

"You 've been gone so long," faltered the father, "I — I had forgotten. I expected to see you as you were when you left."

"I was a boy when I left," answered Barnes.

"Yes, yes, and I was not boy enough. You — you forgive, Joe?"

"It is for you to forgive, father."

"Your voice has grown kinder. Eleanor — you are my eyes. Help me to see him as he is to-day. He is taller?"

"Yes," she answered.

"He is tanned?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"I can see him! I can see him! He has grown handsome, my boy, eh?"

She met Barnes' eyes steadily.

"Yes," she answered, "I think you could say that."

"Where is Philomela?" he demanded suddenly. "She should be here to see my boy."

"She is downstairs, Daddy. She — she was a bit overcome."

"What wonder? This goes to one's head."

He lay back upon the pillows, his breath coming brokenly. Barnes feared for him.

"I must not stay long, father," he ventured. "You must rest a little. I 'll come up later."

He felt the sudden grip of Van Patten's fingers upon his arm.

"There is so much for you to tell. I 've lost five years out of your life."

"There are all the days to come."

"There must be many — many to make up for the days that have gone."

"I will try to bring back those days to you."

"You are glad to be home again, eh?"

"Yes," Barnes answered truthfully. "You make me glad to be here."

"There are so many things," he faltered. "But your aunt must see you. She is not as strong as I am. I — I am afraid she is failing a little."

"You will rest now?"

"Yes, I can rest now. Boy, you have brought *me* home."

Barnes pressed the feeble hand and rose.

"Shall I send John to you?" asked the daughter. "Do you need anything?"

"Nothing more," he answered, as he sank back wearily among the pillows. He looked like a man who had come to the end of a long journey.

Barnes started out.

"You 'll be downstairs? You 'll be where I can call you?"

"Yes," answered Barnes.

The girl stopped and kissed her father's thin lips. He reached up his hand and smoothed her hair a moment. Then his arm fell and he seemed to sleep, dropping off quickly as a child does.

Aunt Philomela had not moved. When the two came in again, she glanced up swiftly.

"Well?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes," answered Barnes. "It is well."

"Then you were successful in your deception?"

Miss Van Patten crossed to her aunt's side and kissed her gray hair. She kept her face hidden there for a moment.

"Aunt! Aunt!" she choked. "If you could have seen!"

Between anger, shame, and relief Aunt Philomela's lips trembled. But she answered sharply,

"Thank the Lord I was saved from all active participation."

"If you could have heard his glad cry!"

"I should have been ashamed."

But in spite of her answer the corners of her mouth grew less tense and the little patches of rose upon her cheeks returned again. Barnes felt glad of that. With her spirit up, she seemed less formidable.

"He accepted you without suspicion?" she inquired of Barnes as though she could not yet believe it.

"In such blind heart-hunger as his," he answered, "there is little room for suspicion."

"Truly," she answered tartly, "my brother must be quite blind."

As a relief from the tension of the last few minutes, Aunt Philomela's sharp tongue came as a relish to Barnes. He had never in his life passed a more uncomfortable quarter of an hour.

"There are worse things in the world than blindness," he suggested.

Miss Van Patten raised her head.

"I was afraid — almost afraid that father's eyes would open and he would see again."

"Only a guilty conscience could inspire such a fear," snapped Aunt Philomela.

"Don't you want to have him happy?" challenged her niece. "He is sleeping now — the first time for two days."

"He is sleeping?"

"We used to give him powders to make him sleep and forget. Is n't this a better way?"

"Sleeping powders, my dear, do not operate upon the whole family!"

Barnes smiled.

"Am I so dull?" he asked.

"I was referring to their dream properties rather than their soporific," Aunt Philomela answered with some magnanimity and yet with suspicious point, too.

"There *is* a distinction between dreaming and sleeping," he admitted.

"A clear distinction."

"It might mark all the difference between a poet and a bore."

"There is little harm in bores," declared Aunt Philomela.

"You flatter me."

"You have drawn a wrong deduction."

"Then you flatter me still more. I had never thought of myself as a poet. However, if you fear the dreams — an old man's dreams — it is not too late to withdraw."

"I should call it a great deal too late."

"No," he answered decidedly. "I 'll frame some sort of an excuse for returning to Alaska to-morrow. It may be a bit clumsy but I can make it answer."

"You 're an adept at that sort of thing."

"It is for you to decide what we shall do," he insisted.

The little old lady hesitated. She disliked very much being cornered in such fashion. But Barnes had caught the worry in the girl's eyes and realized the necessity of having this settled at once.

"It is already decided," she fenced.

"Only as far as this. He has his dreams for to-day. That is something. To-morrow is not decided."

Miss Van Patten started. Barnes waited relentlessly.

"I — I don't know," faltered Aunt Philomela.

Still he waited. Miss Van Patten started to interpose but he checked her with a glance. The silence grew oppressive.

"You have no right," squirmed Aunt Philomela.

"Exactly," he interposed. "You alone have the right."

"Then," she snapped. "I suppose we must."

"I think it 's the only way," he agreed quietly.

Miss Van Patten embraced her aunt excitedly.

"I knew you 'd approve," she cried.

"Upon complusion," interjected Aunt Philomela.

"No," warned Barnes, "I refuse to have it so."

"Of circumstances," added the aunt quickly.

"Which prompt us to every act," threw in Barnes.

"Wise and unwise," commented the aunt grimly.

Barnes allowed the matter to drop leaving Aunt Philomela with the last word which she accepted in an unmistakable spirit of victory.

The girl was all activity at once.

"We must show Mr. Barnes to Joe's room and then supper will be ready," she exclaimed.

As she met her aunt's eyes she blushed with pretty embarrassment but she immediately tripped out of the room and soon returned with John.

"John," she ordered. "You will make Mr. Joe's room ready at once. You will follow him?" she asked, turning to Barnes.

It was neatly done. With a bow to Aunt Philomela, Barnes made his exit.

The room to which he was led had been prepared for weeks. It faced the East. It was large and was furnished with a huge black walnut bed, a cool matting of green, a great high-boy with brass handles, and a bureau with drawers two feet deep. White dimity curtains fluttered at the windows. But for the moment John interested him more than the homely furnishings.

John was as stoical as an English butler. He was

short, stout, and of that non-committal middle age which ranges between twenty-five and forty. He met one's eyes with a sort of timid stare and a suggestion that he knew and he would tell. There was a nodding mystery about him. He made Barnes feel like searching the room to see what it was that the man silently hinted might be concealed. John was a piquer of curiosity — a caballer with the unknown.

"John," suggested Barnes after the man had thrown back the spread, shown him his bath, and glanced about significantly for his baggage. "John, I think you 'd better look under the bed."

John obeyed and stared so long into a dark corner there, that Barnes took a position on his knees beside him.

"Did you see anything move?" he inquired.

"Move? Where, sir?" John gasped.

"Over there. A sort of — Thing."

"Good Lord, sir!"

"I may have been mistaken," Barnes admitted, "but perhaps we 'd better examine the closets."

John crossed the room with some hesitation and with many backward glances. He opened the closet door the matter of a foot and peered in. Barnes coughed. John darted back.

"Anything there, John?"

"What — what did you expect, sir?"

"A sort of — Thing."

"No, sir," answered John eagerly and with conviction, moving deeper into the room. "There 's nothing of that sort there, sir."

"You see," explained Barnes. "I 've just come from the frozen North. There are many strange things there — very strange things."

"Yes, sir."

"You may go."

John accepted his dismissal with alacrity.

"If there are to be mysteries here," commented Barnes to himself. "We may as well have them picturesque."

CHAPTER IV.

QUESTIONS OF DIPLOMACY

At the round table covered with sun-bleached napery and silver that caught the candle light until it seemed ablaze, Aunt Philomela, with a diplomacy equaled only by that of King Arthur, had so arranged the places that no one could tell who sat opposite who. She herself presided at the quaint old silver tea urn, so that naturally marked the head of the board. But Barnes and Miss Van Patten were placed equi-distant from her on either side so that they did not face one another.

On the table were damson preserves, a clear crimson as of molten rubies; milk-white bread; a bowl of crisp salad fresh from the garden; and a pitcher of milk so heavy with cream that it poured the lightest possible shade of coffee-color.

Aunt Philomela had freshened herself in a purple gown relieved by spider thread lace. Her niece was in a gossamer white China silk sprinkled with blue polka dots. In her black hair she wore a tortoise-shell comb surmounted with old gold scroll of the finest Venetian workmanship. It was just the touch needed to bring out the Italian richness

of her features. She might now have been presiding at some old Patrician board with the chanties of the gondoliers floating in at the open windows, except for Aunt Philomela, stern as a Puritan conscience — and the damson preserves. On the whole Barnes liked her better in her present setting. To them all came the song of a whip-poor-will mourning to his mate beneath the purple sky in the orchard just outside.

"How will you have your tea?" asked Aunt Philomela.

"With cream, Aunt Philomela, no sugar if you please."

Miss Van Patten held her breath. Aunt Philomela sat fixed with the tongs poised over the square sugar bowl.

"Such audacity!" she choked.

"I was only speaking my line," he hastened to explain. "The servants, you know."

"I think it quite necessary," put in the girl, hastily bringing up reënforcements at the sight of her aunt's snapping eyes.

"It will take me some time to get used to it," added Barnes. "You see I haven't the good fortune to have a real aunt."

"It is an unpardonable liberty," protested Aunt Philomela, unreasonably.

"And you must call me Joe," he hurried on, "and I must address your niece as Eleanor."

Barnes himself was a little breathless after that. He found himself studying the damson preserves. Had he looked up he would have found them a good match for Miss Van Patten's cheeks.

"I see no help for it," agreed the latter.

"Eleanor," trembled the aunt.

"Well, is there?" she demanded. "How else can he address me before the servants?"

"He can at least refrain, when the servants are *not* in the room."

She dropped two lumps of sugar into Barnes' cup.

"If you please," murmured Barnes, "no sugar, Aunt Philomela."

Aunt Philomela corrected her mistake by adding another lump. Barnes accepted it with a murmur of thanks.

"You see," he continued more at ease, "John already has his suspicions."

"He has?" exclaimed the aunt uneasily. "But he has never seen Joe! He has been with us only since we came here."

"All I know," Barnes answered, "is that John looked under the bed and in the closets before he left me."

The aunt did not disclose the fact that this was one of John's nightly duties in the modest room she occupied next to her niece's, but the latter's eyes warmed into a smile.

"Perhaps that was mere force of habit," hinted Miss Van Patten.

Aunt Philomela turned a warning glance upon her niece — her cheeks coloring daintily.

"It made me realize that I ought to know more about myself," Barnes continued.

"You were precious little good," vouchsafed the aunt.

"Must I act up to my reputation?" he asked solicitously.

Miss Van Patten put in kindly,

"I think you will have no difficulty in living up to the Joe my father found to-day."

"I think it wise to idealize the boy as far as possible," he said.

Miss Van Patten served him with salad and a portion of the damson preserves.

"But there are certain details," he persisted.

"If you 're going to idealize Joe, you 'd better leave out the details," advised Aunt Philomela.

"I referred more particularly to the historical details," he answered. "There is for instance the question of my age."

"You will be twenty-three next October," Aunt Philomela condescended to inform him.

"Thank you. Then I suppose I ought to know the ages of — my relatives."

"Which matches well with your other presumptions," answered the aunt with heat.

But here Miss Van Patten took the matter into her own hands and sketched for him as delicately as possible the brief career of this only son. She told first a little something of the mother who had been dead ten years now and of the blow this was to the father. Mr. Van Patten had practically retired, when this occurred, from the bank where he had for so long been president. For a few years they lived on in New York, with Aunt Philomela, her mother's sister, filling the gap as best she could. Joe even as a child had been hard to handle and when he grew up became very willful. He did not like school and so Mr. Van Patten, when the boy was sixteen, found a position for him in the bank. But he was restless there and did not stay long. He tried one thing after another without success and finally when rebuked by his father, left home altogether. During these years she herself had been away at school and so had seen little of her brother. After the boy left, her father broke down and upon the advice of the doctors came back here in the hills. They had been here now five

years living very much to themselves. From time to time they had heard from the boy in his wanderings, locating him a few months ago in Alaska.

It was an undramatic narrative and yet as it fell from her lips Barnes listened with keen absorption. Or was it merely to the melody of her voice? After she had ceased, he found himself still listening.

"May I serve you to more tea?" interrupted Aunt Philomela.

Barnes thoughtfully stirred the thick syrup in his cup.

"I think not, thank you." he answered.

"So you see," added Miss Van Patten, "there is not very much for you to learn."

"No," he smiled, "I 'm not so black as I was painted. But there are still some other things I must post myself on. I would like —"

"I positively refuse to surrender my private papers," objected Aunt Philomela.

"An atlas," Barnes finished.

"An atlas!" gasped Aunt Philomela. taken by surprise.

"An atlas. I must study my geography. The most I know of Alaska at present is that it 's the home of polar bears. Are you familiar with the habits of polar bears, Aunt Philomela?"

The girl smiled. That was what Barnes had wished.

"No. I fear I can't assist you in that fabrication," Aunt Philomela answered curtly.

"There is a bear in the park," he informed her. "I 've often watched him. Upon that subject at least I may speak with some authority. But there are many other things in Alaska. Eskimos, for instance. I 'm a little weak on Eskimos. In the pictures they look much like the bears except that they carry harpoons. There are also the details of mining — have you ever been interested in mines?"

"Yes," scowled Aunt Philomela. "In a weak moment Joe persuaded me by letter."

Clearly that was a delicate subject. He swerved away from it.

"I must post myself on names. I recall only Nome, White Horse, and Dawson.

The girl smiled again.

"That *is* a complication," she exclaimed. "Father is sure to question you. He is interested in travel."

"I 'll do my best to instruct h[illegible]."

"I don't think you 're justified in imposing upon a helpless old man," declared Aunt Philomela, severely.

"My dear aunt," returned Ba[illegible]es, amiably, "all

of us stay-at-homes are imposed upon by our traveling brothers. I have a friend who has been to India whom I have often confuted with the aid of an encyclopedia. Unless I 'm mistaken, my stories will compare favorably with any Joe himself might tell."

"They could n't be much more untruthful," the aunt admitted, thinking of her mine.

"That gives me a pleasant margin."

"Of one fact I can assure you," she further volunteered, "gold does *not* lie around the hills in chunks — at least not in the vicinity of 'The Lucky Find.'"

"I 'll make a note of that."

"Which I hope will prove more valuable than my nephew's notes."

John stole in at the door.

"He is calling for Mr. Van Patten, Miss Schuyler."

Schuyler? Barnes received a pleasant surprise at the name. His ancestors had fought under Schuyler and now fortune had decreed that he himself should enter an engagement with one of that hero's descendants.

Aunt Philomela glanced towards Barnes with something like reliance.

"Very well, John," he answered, "I 'll be right up."

He turned to his hostess.

"May I hope that the ladies will not have retired before I return?"

"You may be assured of that fact," answered Aunt Philomela with decision.

He had no sooner left the room than she confronted her niece.

"Well?" she demanded, indicating clearly that she still held the girl accountable for the whole situation.

Miss Van Patten lowered her eyes.

"You make it very hard," she murmured.

"I?" snorted the aunt. "What have I to do with it? I wash my hands of the whole affair."

"You can't do that," she exclaimed, "after you asked him to remain!"

"I asked him to remain? I? When that great tall man stood over me —"

In her indignation she could go no further.

"Why he would n't hurt you. He would n't hurt — anything."

"What do you know about him?"

"Can't you *see*?"

"Yes," answered the aunt, "I can see."

"One need only look at his eyes."

She stopped. Her aunt had a most embarrassing way at times.

"I suppose he means well enough," admitted the aunt more kindly.

"How can he mean anything else? What has he to gain by giving his time to us?"

"It is not easy to understand men — especially young men," affirmed Aunt Philomela.

"There is n't anything to understand, when one is just kind."

"A great deal more sometimes than when one is merely unkind."

Miss Van Patten met her aunt's eyes.

"Aunt," she declared, "if you could have seen the joy in Daddy's face you would n't bother yourself with suspicions. We have n't any right to consider ourselves at all in this matter. We 've saved father a great grief. Is n't that enough?"

The aunt shook her head slowly.

"My dear," she answered, "you 've been swept on by your emotions. You don't realize the seriousness of what we 've done. We 've taken into the intimacy of our family a stranger — a young stranger, about whom we know nothing. Supposing any of our relatives should swoop down on us from New York? What would they say? What will our friends about here say? What will Dr. Merriweather say?"

The girl answered quietly,

"What does all that matter when you think of what we 've saved Daddy?"

"Matter? It would mean nothing short of a scandal."

Miss Van Patten flushed. But she answered still quietly,

"I think you 're mistaken, Aunty. But even that — what would that matter?"

"Bah. You are n't out of your swaddling-clothes as far as the world goes."

The girl crept closer to her aunt. She placed her hand upon the thin shoulder.

"Aunty dear, if you found an old man bruised by the road, would you hesitate? Do we need a stranger to show us how just to be kind? That is n't the way you 've helped the poor with Dr. Merriweather."

Aunt Philomela looked steadily into the young girl's face.

"My dear," she answered, "I 'm seventy-two and you 're twenty-two."

"Must I wait until I am your age before I 'm human?"

"Perhaps — before you learn that you *are* human."

Then the aunt asked an apparently irrelevant question,

"Is Carl coming over to practice with you to-night?"

Miss Van Patten turned away.

"I have n't been thinking of Carl."

"How are you going to introduce him to this stranger?"

Miss Van Patten did not answer.

"You see," observed Aunt Philomela as she rose from the table, "there are more complications here than you think of."

The two made their way into the sitting room. The aunt took a chair near the window. Miss Van Patten remained standing, looking out into the dark.

"I shall send a note to Carl telling him I 'm engaged for this evening," she concluded. She gave the letter to John and then returned. Aunt Philomela remained staring at the door. It was a full half hour before Barnes came down.

"Alaska," he announced, sinking into a chair in the ark, "Alaska is said to be a cold country, but at times it gets most uncomfortably hot there."

CHAPTER V

THREE FINGERED BILL

Barnes noted that Miss Van Patten had a personality which asserted itself even in the dark. Though he could see nothing of her more than an outline, he was able to follow every expression. This made it easier to understand how the blind father gave himself up completely to that other illusion.

"Will you ring for a light, Eleanor?" requested Aunt Philomela.

"The dark is very restful," hazarded Barnes.

He rather enjoyed the situation. It gave his imagination freer play.

"The dark may keep us all in better countenance," assented the aunt tartly.

"You left him happy? He suspected nothing?" inquired Miss Van Patten, eagerly.

"I left him asleep," answered Barnes.

"Oh, that 's good. He has n't slept at night."

"He has worried a great deal?"

"It 's been enough to break one's heart to hear

him call for Joe night after night in the dark."

"If ever I meet the boy," observed Barnes with impressive deliberateness, "I shall try to make him live for himself the hour I 've just lived for him. I listened to a saint, feeling like the Devil."

"I don't understand how Joe had the heart to hurt him," choked the girl.

"He did n't *have* the heart — that 's the trouble," answered Barnes. "No one in the world will venture so far to give us pain as our own."

Aunt Philomela stirred uneasily.

"For sheer mercilessness," added Barnes, "give me a relative. It made me squirm to have to save the boy from the shame he deserves."

"How can we ever thank you for this!" exclaimed Miss Van Patten.

"By letting me stand face to face with the boy sometime."

Aunt Philomela broke in.

"This act is not like Joe. He was never brutal. I don't think he understood."

"No. He probably did n't understand. That 's the brutal part of it. It 's the brutes who don't understand."

He spoke with some heat — more than he intended, but he was still fresh from that interview.

The old man's grip was still on his arm; those sightless eyes were still straining into his. He still heard the irregular breathing and the panting questions — childish questions, trivial questions made great by the love back of them. And to these he had been forced to give lying answers which would never have been accepted save for this same great love and trust. He needed now to be diverted from the memory of it. He was eager to stir up Aunt Philomela — to turn to the lighter side of it though even the comedy of it was tragical.

"If we 're going to be consistent travelers, Aunt Philomela," he began, "it will be necessary for me to repeat my story to you."

"Is travelers the word?" she snapped back.

"The more polite word at any rate," answered Barnes.

"I believe in calling a spade a spade."

"But that is n't any reason for calling everything a spade," he ventured to suggest. "What I was forced to tell him did n't have sufficient truth in it to make it a lie. It was pure fiction. I am sorry I did n't have more time for preparation. My effort was necessarily in the nature of an inspiration. It was crude. It made me sorry that when a boy I neglected physical geography."

Aunt Philomela groaned.

"I 'm sure you did the best you could," declared Miss Van Patten. "It was a very awkward position for you."

"It was to say the least humiliating. He asked a great many questions."

"Poor Daddy."

"He will probably ask still more of Aunt Philomela," he remarked

"If he does!" she exploded.

"If he does?" he inquired.

"Why — this is disgraceful! We 're getting in deeper and deeper."

"And he?"

Aunt Philomela did not answer.

"Well," Barnes finished, "we will hold him high out of the water as long as we can. Shall I repeat to you what I told him?"

"Yes, yes," broke in the girl, "our stories must agree."

"The best I could do was to paint a picture," he half apologized.

"Picture making is your profession, I believe?" questioned Aunt Philomela.

"Yes," he answered slowly. "But *my* public has yes. There are some advantages in painting for the blind. But, for that matter, many supposedly good eyes *are* blind."

"And many supposedly weak ones are sound."

"Exactly. The soul is the vision. I remembered the heading of the boy's letter — 'The Last Chance' — and so had a starting-point. Given, too, the mystical white name 'Alaska' and what setting ought we to furnish a penniless young man with more spirit than heart? It was only a guess but I chose this: a green-blue sky, brittle, stinging; a panorama of white undulating to a horizon shrouded in virgin snow; in the middle distance a few slab huts; in the foreground a closer huddling of camps with the gaudy sign of the 'Nugget' saloon conspicuous. In the single street, bearded men as ungainly as bears in their heavy clothing, glancing with fevered eyes now towards the 'Nugget,' now towards the rugged banker mountains. Lean mongrels attached to sleds, passing from time to time, but no other animals; no birds, no felines, no wasted brute life."

The Princess stole across the room and sprang into the girl's lap. She passed her hand over the silken hair.

"The notable other buildings," continued Barnes, dreamily, "are the post-office, the bank, the assayer's office, all of which are distinguished by their signs. In the bank the sheriff has diplomatically taken up quarters. So much for the stage.

"In a shanty on the outskirts of the settlement, sits Joe — sits myself. I am in heavy trousers tucked into cowhide boots and wear a bearskin coat. I am studying a batch of papers. They are the giddily-printed stock certificates of 'The Lucky Find.'"

"I know them," nodded Aunt Philomela, now quite lost in the narrative.

"I 'm indebted to you for that suggestion," answered Barnes. "I pore over the papers for a minute and then go to a corner where there 's a stout wooden chest marked 'Joe Van Patten, His box,' I take out a package of letters from home. I place them on the table and my eyes grow moist."

"I never saw the boy blubber in my life," objected Aunt Philomela.

"You must n't interrupt," protested Miss Van Patten.

"While I 'm thus sentimentalizing," Barnes hurried on, "enter — three fingered Bill."

"Bah," interrupted the aunt again.

"The name is n't mine," he explained, "I stole it from a magazine story. Besides, Bill was falsely so called — they neglected to count his thumb. Bill is a rough dog with whiskers like an anarchist but with a kindly heart beating beneath his faded pink

sweater. This was a relic of the days when he served as a rubber down at prize fights."

"A pleasant companion," snorted Aunt Philomela.

"A useful one, at any rate. He greets me with a cheery 'Hello, pard, back in the home camp?' I guiltily thrust the packet aside and we come down to business on how most advantageously to use our relatives in the matter of the gorgeous stock certificates."

"So Bill was responsible for that!" exclaimed the aunt.

"Responsible?"

"For disposing of that worthless paper."

She checked herself quickly.

"I hope," she added, "that you did n't hint to Mr. Van Patten what I inadvertently let drop about 'The Lucky Find.'"

"I was very cautious about particularizing in any matter capable of substantiation."

"I would n't for the world have him know. The loss — er the loss was slight."

Barnes felt his heart warm towards Aunt Philomela. It would have warmed still more had he known that this investment involved half her scant property.

"I mentioned the fact that Bill with his wider

experience held out very . . ght prospects for the mine."

"It was thoughtful of you to lay it to Bill."

Mr. Van Patten instantly offered to assist me to the limits of his means.

"If you dare allow him to invest — "

"I have n't even any gilded certificates," he reminded her.

"Of course not. I forgot."

"This is merely a picture. As you see picture making can be the most harmless of occupations. We artists produce the effect, without the danger; we present the rose, without the thorns; we develop our mines, without certificates. I assured Mr. Van Patten that this was no time to invest."

"You did very well," Aunt Philomela complimented him.

"Thank you. Following this I went into the details of the cold weather, but — you know all about that. I assured him that I was warm and that I had plenty to eat."

"Daddy has n't been able to take food at all without wondering if Joe were hungry."

"I was well supplied, I assure you. He wished to know more about my friends and so I introduced him to Sam Foss, a most likeable fellow; Ranston, an old college friend of mine out there somewhere;

and Bart Stanton, a Massachusetts Technology graduate. So you see my friends averaged up pretty well."

"They certainly were an improvement on one fingered Bill."

"*Three* fingered Bill," he corrected, "you must be careful of your details."

"I shall venture to repeat nothing," she asserted. "And you think he believed all that nonsense?"

"As an eager child believes."

"I suppose," she mused sadly, "he *has* become a bit childlike."

"He was a child when listening," Barnes continued, "but when he talked to me it was the father who talked. I'm sorry the real child who wrote the childish letter didn't hear what he said to me."

He paused. Aunt Philomela waited expectantly and so, too, did her niece. But he told them nothing more. That which was not part of the dream — that which was sober reality, he had no heart to repeat.

"That concludes my report," he said as the silence remained unbroken.

Again a silence. Then Miss Van Patten spoke.

"You've been most kind to us. It's hard to know how to thank you."

"It is n't necessary. I 've been well repaid — if that were essential."

Somewhere about the house an old clock chimed nine.

Aunt Philomela rose.

"We retire early in the country," she said wearily, "I 'll call John."

"Thank you. I trust your dreams will be pleasant."

"They will be of Alaska. I feel it in my bones."

"They might be worse located — on a summer evening," he hazarded.

She swept like a royal dowager towards the door. The girl followed but stopped a moment before him.

"Thank you again," she murmured. "Good night."

Then, with the Princess close behind her, she too swept queen like from the room.

As with something of a sigh Barnes half turned, he found John beside him as though he had come up through a trap in the floor.

"Ah, you?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," faltered John, wondering what else his master's son had expected, "will you follow me, sir?"

Lighting a candle, the man escorted him to the

room where the dimity curtains were bulging in from a brisk night breeze. As he placed the flickering light upon the dresser, Barnes inquired,

"You have n't seen — "

"Good Lord, sir. No, sir."

"Very well, John. You may go."

He went, leaving Barnes to the fragrance of the night. The dark of the orchard made him think of her hair.

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERY OF A VISION

Barnes awoke in the morning to the reveille of robins and thrushes. With chirp and whistle and flute note, they sang him from his hearty sleep to a still heartier realization of a new-born day. For a moment, from the motherly lap of his broad bed, he blinked at the chintz curtains and the age-ripened hautboy. What strange caravanserai was this? It was always a pleasure to wake to the memory of the long tramp of the preceding day — to trace his path from the brisk setting out of the previous morning to the final lagging steps at dusk. To-day he traced his course as far as the letter-box and then came to himself as though fresh from a plunge in a mountain brook. But he had no time to think about it before there was a timid knock at the door.

"Yes?" called Barnes.

"Your warm water, sir?"

"Come in."

John stepped over the threshold. His stride was confident. He was bold enough in the daytime whatever he might be at night.

"Miss Schuyler's compliments, sir, and we breakfast at eight."

"What time is it now?"

"Seven, sir."

"Very well. My compliments in return to Eleanor and I will be ready at eight."

John betrayed wonder. Barnes reviewed his speech. Then he himself betrayed even more wonder.

"Did you hear, John?" he demanded sternly, in a clumsy attempt to retrieve himself. "My compliments — my aunt," he paused, "and I will be ready at eight."

"Yes, sir."

Barnes [illegible] anxiously looked about for his dress suit case. Then he remembered that he had [illegible] in the next village, thinking it unnecessary [illegible]. He had not had so much as a razor. He glanced at John's smooth shaven face, hesitated, and then [illegible]

"John — John! I [illegible] razor [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

"I [illegible]

He was back in five minutes with the entire outfit which he placed upon the dresser without a word. Barnes was immensely pleased with his cleverness, while John, who had been the really clever one, remained impassive. Furthermore, being in high good humor at the success of the ruse which had saved him from the humiliation of borrowing from the man, Barnes leaped from his bed so suddenly that John jumped half way to the door.

"What 's the trouble?" inquired Barnes.

"You came so suddenly, sir."

"Perhaps I *was* a bit abrupt. The morning gets into your blood."

"It 's the Arctic weather I presume, sir."

"Yes. Ah, yes, that is probably it."

He began to lather his face but John still delayed, shuffling a bit nervously.

"You left 'The Lucky Find' well, sir?" he ventured with an apologetic cough. It was as though he spoke of a lady. It was as though he spoke of an intimate friend in whom he took great interest.

"Pretty well, thank you," answered Barnes in some surprise.

"I reads as how you brought twenty million in gold out of the country last year, sir."

"I?"

"Oh, not you alone, sir, but all the mines to-

gether. I didn't know but what 'The Lucky Find' had a share in it, as the sayin' goes."

Barnes caught his breath. Then he carefully lathered one ear. It didn't need lathering any more than his shoes. It was something of an automatic movement.

"Let me see," he asked quietly, "how much stock did you have?"

"Not much, sir. I haven't saved as much as I might. But when I saw the papers you sent on to the mistress, I mailed what I had. It was only a thousand, sir."

"Yes, I remember now. A thousand dollars."

Barnes turned back to the mirror. He wiped the lather from his ear.

"Bring my trousers, John."

The man obeyed.

"Reach in the right hand side pocket."

John brought out two five-dollar bills.

"Put one of them back."

John obeyed and held the other one in his hand uncertainly.

"That," said Barnes, "is our first annual dividend. It should have been sent to you before."

"Thank you, sir. I didn't hope for so much, but —"

"You may go," said Barnes, picking up his razor.

Barnes completed his dressing with dispatch. It occurred to him that if he hurried he might possibly beat out Aunt Philomela, and so have a few words with the girl before she came down.

As he stepped into the living room, Aunt Philomela greeted him with a curt nod.

"I trust three fingered Bill did n't disturb your dreams," he observed with polite interest.

The girl was nowhere to be seen.

"Bah. Something worse," snapped Aunt Philomela as though she held him directly responsible for it. "It was half a walrus."

"Perhaps that is the Thing John was looking for," he suggested.

He turned towards the window in the hope that he might discover Miss Van Patten in the flower-
ardens. They blossomed just beyond — a medley
sweet alyssum, mignonette, heliotrope, cosmos,
marigolds. She was not there.

"To what do you refer by the Thing?" demanded Aunt Philomela.

"The Thing he looked for under the bed."

The color stole into her cheeks making them look more than ever like cameos.

"In these days, with so many strangers on the road, one cannot be too careful," she avowed.

"No," he admitted, "I understand that many

estimable persons even in New York make it a habit to look under their beds."

At length Miss Van Patten came in. She was in white again with a loose crimson tie at her throat. She looked as though she might have been in the garden after all — growing there like the other flowers for she had a freshness that only the dew can give. She greeted him with a smile that brightened the room like the sun.

"Daddy is in better spirits than I 've seen him for a year," she exclaimed. "He asked for you as soon as he woke up."

"Perhaps then I had better step up there for a minute before breakfast."

"Would you? He 's waiting so impatiently."

"I 'll go at once."

"He repeated to me what you told him. You did n't tell us all."

She blushed prettily, timid at sharing with him a secret in which her aunt for the moment was not included.

"Most everything," he replied uneasily.

"You don't mind because he told me?"

She feared that he might consider it in the light of a confidence betrayed.

"No," he answered sincerely.

But lest she go further into the subject he turned

abruptly and made his way again to the room of shadows.

Aunt Philomela at once faced her niece.

"What is this great secret?" she demanded somewhat piqued.

"I 'm not sure that I ought to tell you," replied the girl with a tinkling laugh which was like the ripple of water over pebbles.

"Pardon my presumption," snapped the aunt cuttingly, as she assumed her state dignity.

This consisted of standing so erect that she crinkled, drawing her chin the slightest bit in, and folding her hands at the level of her waist. The girl promptly stepped forward and kissed her.

"It was partly of you he spoke."

Aunt Philomela drew back with a more genuine emotion.

"What an impertinence!" she exclaimed.

"Daddy evidently asked him if he saw any change in you."

"Of all —"

"And Mr. Barnes told him he thought you had grown younger."

"I shall thank William not to discuss me in the future."

"Oh, but your ears would have burned if you 'd heard the rest."

"What wonder! To allow a stranger to discuss such intimate matters is — is almost indecent."

"Remember it was as Joe that Mr. Barnes spoke. But," she added thoughtfully, "I 'm not sure Joe himself would have spoken so beautifully."

"The bold, young fellow."

"The most wonderful thing of all," continued the girl, her eyes growing wistful, "was the way he talked to Daddy about mother. How was he able to do that when he never knew her — never saw her?"

"Your mother," replied Aunt Philomela, soberly, "would never forgive me if she knew I countenanced such goings on."

"How was he able to do it?" repeated Eleanor, her thoughts spanning a decade.

Aunt Philomela scanned the girl's face anxiously, lovingly.

"La, dear," she murmured.

"He spoke of her eyes — describing them as woodland pools at twilight. You remember mother's eyes were just like that."

"Yes, dear. They were like that — like your eyes."

"He spoke of the tender sweetness of her face — of her black hair with the gold in it. You remember the gold in mother's hair?"

"Yes, dear. Your hair is much the same."

"He even described her skin. He said it was like ivory with rose in it."

"Yes," answered Aunt Philomela, noting the rose now in the ivory of her niece's cheeks.

"That sounded almost as though he were standing in front of mother, did n't it? It is as though he saw a vision!"

Aunt Philomela pressed her lips firmly together. When, a moment later Barnes himself came in, she kept her eyes fixed upon her niece.

"Eleanor," she announced, "I shall ask Carl to come over this morning."

CHAPTER VII

THE CALL OF THE ROAD

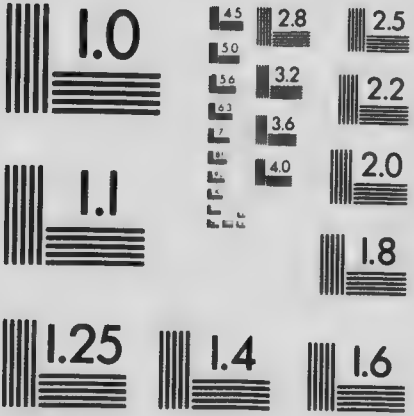
As soon as Mr. Van Patten dropped to sleep for his morning nap, Barnes determined to suggest to the girl a plan he had conceived during breakfast. That it would impress Aunt Philomela as audacious he had no doubt; that it would meet with kindlier interest from Miss Van Patten, he dared hope. With the decided improvement in the old gentleman's condition the spirit of the whole household rose high. Not only had he slept well during the night, but he had partaken of a fairly good breakfast.

The morning hour had also been easier for Barnes. Mr. Van Patten had clung to the young boy — the boy before he had become himself and was still merely his father's boy. Barnes had scarcely more to do than listen. Alaska had been forgotten.

The morning itself, too, gave courage. The sun, now in supreme authority, held in the bondage of shadows every unsightly thing and marshaled forth to the front its legions of the beautiful. Everywhere it put youth in command; chief of all on the

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

saffron road which ran before the brick house and later connected with other roads which in turn connected with still other roads until a path was made clear across the continent.

The road summoned forth. It beckoned. The wonder was, thought Barnes as from his window he caught glimpses of it winding in and out among the trees up the hill and so on, either way, until it ran straight into an ocean — the wonder was how these young fellows hereabouts resisted its call. If a man but followed it in its intricacies he would pass, on the way, every palace and hovel in the land. Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, a traveler would come upon them every one. These tawny ribbons drained every spring of human life. They demanded their toll of time from all the world. And in the end, when the legs failed, all the world was finally borne over this same road and lowered to one side of it. The wonder was, then, that instead of a few dreaming poets and a few lawless vagabonds that all the young men in the world were not caught by the spell of the highway and the pageant it promised.

But what of the spell of the houses by the side of the highway? They cried halt to the young men. Ah, there lay the explanation — the road after all was subservient to the houses by its side.

But there were many houses by the side of the road; how did each house choose its own? By the eyes of the women who dwelt in the houses. Clearly then, the houses themselves were subservient.

Were the eyes of the women then the final masters? Here was a problem for a philosopher. He knew only that he himself had been stopped, with the road beckoning him on.

Miss Van Patten was busy for an hour with her household tasks before she returned to where Barnes had stationed himself at the foot of the Dutch door. A snow-white apron made her look very business-like. Aunt Philomela was for the moment carelessly absent. Here was Opportunity.

"I had in mind," he said, "going to the next village for my suit-case. I checked it there thinking at first to ride through but the station below here tempted me and I got off."

"I 'll send John for it," she replied, wondering that she herself had not anticipated his need. The reason was, though her modesty made her refrain from offering the explanation, that she never associated baggage with men folk. To her they were always as untrammeled and unburdened as her saddle horse Aladdin.

"But I looked forward to the walk," he said.

"Oh!"

"I thought that perhaps you — "

"Oh," she exclaimed again. But this time it was an entirely different sort of an "Oh." It was a shy, fluttering monosyllable — resembling a bird who, flushed from its nest, flies but a little way. Her eyes reflected a certain eagerness — her quick glance towards the door a certain timidity. Her cheeks assumed a compromise.

"It would be just an easy turn, down and back, would n't it? The sun is calling."

Now Aladdin had been chafing three days in his stall unheeded by his mistress, whinnying an answer to the bugle call of this same sun as it sifted in through the chinks. But the most satisfaction he had found was in her whispered solace, "To-morrow, perhaps." Yet of all living things outside the house, she loved him best.

"It would be very pleasant," she confessed.

"Then — ?"

"I think I may go," she determined.

Which proved — what? It is very difficult to prove anything at all but this at least would seem to prove that Aunt Philomela was not as vigilant as she might have been. She came in just as the girl was adjusting her hat of brown Leghorn — in fact at the moment that Barnes was engrossed in watching the bewitching operation of the tying of a

pert bow of damson-colored ribbon beneath an ear which looked of too delicate workmanship to be of any actual use. But that it was seemed evident from the fact that it detected Aunt Philomela's steps long before his own of coarser fiber heard anything at all.

"It 's an art," declared Barnes to the little old lady as she stood in the doorway, a living human question mark. "It 's an art to be able to tie a bow-knot. I 've practiced twenty years and succeeded only in developing an affair with dropping ends which won't come untied."

Aunt Philomela did not display as much interest as she might in this statement. She was one to go to the heart of things. She was not to be decoyed from the nub of a situation. Very well, then, he decided, she should have it.

"Eleanor and I," he informed her, "thought of taking to the road." He added immediately not so bold as he had determined to be,

"I must get my bag."

"John is at your service," snapped Aunt Philomela, instantly.

"But John is n't able to exercise for me; John is n't able to drink in the sun for me. There are many things that John could n't do for me."

It was clear these considerations had little weight with her.

"Perhaps you 'll come along too?" he ventured.

If it had been within the realm of possibility for her to make her feeble limbs wag over those four miles she would have taken him up just to foil the childlike innocence with which he veiled his sense of confident security. Even as it was, she contrived to frighten him.

"I will order the carriage."

But here Miss Van Patten herself interposed.

"It 's too fine a day to drive," she declared sensibly. "We 'll be back by the time father wakes. Do you want anything at the village?"

"I would n't for the world burden you," Aunt Philomela answered, coldly.

Which, on the whole, thought Barnes, was a reply unworthy of her.

So it happened that within less than twenty-four hours, Barnes took up the trail again — with a difference. In the first place he no longer carried his portfolio. Moreover he did not miss it. And yet he had not proceeded a hundred yards before he passed material enough to fill it. He gave scarcely a glance at the old patriarchs of apple-trees looking like muscle-knotted dwarfs engaged in the absurd task of supporting green apples no larger than marbles; at the sturdy pines whispering Norwegian sagas, the lithe birches, and the shivering poplars.

"Daddy and I have taken this road so many times. He loves it," exclaimed Miss Van Patten.

"Of course he does!" he nodded.

She turned her eyes towards him in some amazement at his assurance.

"You understand Daddy so well," she said.

"The big emotions," he declared thoughtfully, "make us all of kin. Man-sorrows draw men together as women-sorrows draw women together. Sound us deep enough and all men are brothers, all women sisters. Sound us still deeper and even sex vanishes; we become just comrades."

"Aunt Philomela proves the rule? I wish she were in better humor."

"I would n't for a fortune have her change," he returned quickly.

"You don't mind her sharp tongue?"

"It relieves me of a great responsibility."

"I don't understand."

"Aunt Philomela," he declared, "is attorney for the world. There 's nothing like a stiff prosecution to stiffen one's own defense — if it 's a fair one."

"Oh, I see."

That was doubtful but she thought she saw, which is quite as satisfactory.

"In a way your aunt's opposition is the old case of Art versus Reality," he continued, "the Academy

versus the Acme. But Lord forgive us, the controversy is a purely scholastic one. If we only get deep enough in our thoughts, as in our emotions, we find ourselves again all one. Aunt Philomela is n't so suspicious of me as she is of my portfolio."

"She is n't really ferocious," she assured him. "And she *does* appreciate your kindness."

"That, at any rate, does n't matter."

"The change in father this morning is marvelous. It made me know that we 're doing right — however strange it seems."

"Does it seem strange to you?"

"It certainly is — unusual."

"Yes, I suppose it is and yet it is n't anything more than the road led me to expect."

"That 's what it is to be a man," she smiled. "Women are allowed to expect so little."

He was studying her mouth. It was so simply and yet so marvelously drawn. He had decided it was a child's mouth, but at this he glanced up quickly.

"And yet," he said, "women are the mothers of expectancy."

She turned away her head without replying. She was a bit shy of his loose generalizing. She brought him back again to her father. She made vivid to him the days of close comradeship she had passed with the old gentleman during these last two years.

After this he led her out to tell him more of the neighbors and of her life among them. He listened for the names and made it a point to fix them in his mind. Among them as she rambled on there was one Carl Langdon, he noted, who stood out a bit more than the others. Langdon it seemed, played a violin and she herself was musical. He refused to satisfy his curiosity by pressing any further along this line than she of her own accord led him. Yet, as it was, there were several little things about Langdon which excited his interest.

Before they knew it, they reached the beginning of the descent which led into the village of white houses huddled at the foot of the surrounding hills, like sheep pressing warm sides together against a blizzard. At the glimpse of the steel path of the railroad, Barnes impulsively turned away.

"Shall we go back?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered absent-mindedly.

So they retraced their steps over the same road, which yet seemed to him a new road. On the return he found himself reciprocating her confidence by telling something of his own life. It seemed an uninteresting enough tale and yet he found her listening with apparent eagerness. In fact before he knew it she had led him a great deal further than he had intended to go. He had proposed covering

only the blunt facts of his life such as their present relations gave her a right to know, but before he realized it he had gone into a great many more intimate details.

It was not until they were within sight of the house, that he awoke to what her eyes had enticed from him. Then he drew himself up short, a bit startled by the phenomenon. He was usually reticent about himself.

"I beg your pardon," he apologized, "I must have bored you."

"You have n't," she answered frankly.

"At any rate," he said, "I had no idea of going into those matters."

She smiled again and this time he saw that her mouth was after all not a child's mouth.

Aunt Philomela met them at the door, as though she had been some time waiting for them. She fixed her eyes upon the girl as though to discover at a glance what this morning contained. Then she turned to Barnes, raising her scant eyebrows a trifle.

"You gave your bag to the marketman to bring back?" she asked blandly.

Bag? Bag, to be sure. It was a blow straight from the shoulder. It was another case of where he had not carried out his original intentions.

"I have decided," stammered Barnes, "that if you will be so good, you may send John for it."

"And the other things you mentioned?"

"I 've been able to attend to myself."

The girl was trying to edge by into the house. Aunt Philomela stopped her.

"Carl is waiting in the sitting-room for you," she announced. "He is anxious to meet — your brother."

CHAPTER VIII

AN ESTIMABLE YOUNG MAN

Barnes found himself shaking hands with a pleasant looking young fellow of twenty-two or three who had a thin, earnest face and curly brown hair.

"This *is* a surprise," exclaimed Langdon, "I did n't know Miss Van Patten had a brother."

"I did come as a bit of surprise," admitted Barnes, "but so did you for that matter."

"I?"

Miss Van Patten was taking as long a time as possible to remove her hat. Her cheeks were decidedly scarlet. But she did not run as Barnes half expected her to do. She returned and dropped into a chair before the two men.

"This is as good as a story-book, Miss Van Patten," exclaimed Langdon.

"It 's better than a story-book," she laughed.

"When I received your note last night I thought you must be ill or something. Miss Schuyler said this morning that you had gone to walk."

"Yes," she murmured uneasily.

"We went after my baggage," explained Barnes.

"So Miss Schuyler said. She tells me you 've had lots of interesting experience in Alaska. I tried to get her to repeat some of your adventures but she told me I 'd have to wait until I saw you."

"So?" grinned Barnes, "but she knows almost as much about them now, as I do myself."

"Nothing like getting them first hand," said Langdon.

He turned to Miss Van Patten.

"I was afraid we 'd have to give up our duets if you had a guest. But we can go on with them now — may n't we? Unless Mr. Van Patten needs quiet."

"Oh, he 's much improved," the girl assured him.

Langdon entered into a rhapsody over some new music which had just been sent him from New York. Manifestly Barnes was not needed here. He made his apologies.

"But I say," exclaimed Langdon as Barnes was leaving, "I want to hear something about that country."

"Whenever you wish," answered Barnes.

He retreated to the library and finding paper there sat down to write home. He headed his letter "Schuyler headquarters."

"Dear Mother," he began, "I saw your eyes yesterday in the straggling mist of some cotton-blossom

clouds and they brought you very near to me. This is a wonderful country. I know that enough of you has survived the apartment houses and the Acme to allow you to enjoy it if you were here. The hawthorn in your blood would respond to the glad sunshine and the unsmirched sky. And the quiet too is such as you would like. You remember the walks we used to take in the Park on clear mornings when it seemed like a fairy island? It is like that here. I want to thank you right now for the times you took me to the Zoo. I didn't think then that the information I picked up would prove so valuable. I don't know what I should have done here without my knowledge of polar bears. One of the great delights of Art is that sooner or later every tittle of information one picks up is used. Art wastes nothing except time.

"My exercise has kept me in the best of condition. This morning I made only four miles but before that I have consistently covered fifteen. I think I shall linger a little here. I've found material for a big picture. The subject is different from anything you've ever seen of mine. I think even father might appreciate this. I've about decided to attempt it in oils; a sort of study in black and gold and damson preserves." He scratched out damson preserves and substituted crimson. "I'm uncer-

tain about the size of the canvas. Sometimes I think it ought to be heroic, like the Santa Barbara at Venice, and at other times I feel as though I can convey the impression of its fineness only in a miniature. Then again I feel as though it ought to be swept in with bold color strokes, and at other times as though it ought to be just suggested in grays. You see — "

Someone came to the door.

"Pardon me," apologized Miss Van Patten, "I did n't know you were here."

He rose instantly.

"Won't you come in for a moment?" he pleaded. "Has Mr. Langdon gone?"

"He has returned for his music."

"Oh, I see."

"He plays very well."

"On the flute?"

"The violin. He has studied abroad. He 's here for the summer visiting Dr. Merriweather."

"And you — you play?"

"On the 'cello — but only a very little. I 'm afraid this — this new complication is going to be rather embarrassing. I don't like to tell Carl untruths."

"You need n't. Leave that to me. Won't you come in?"

She hesitated and then stepped in resolutely. She settled comfortably into a big chair on the opposite side of the library table.

"At first," she said, "I thought only of Daddy and Aunt Philomela. But now that others are brought in, it does n't seem quite right to them, does it?"

"It seems inevitable and what is inevitable is right."

She shook her head,

"I 'm afraid you 're mistaken. But at any rate what is inevitable is inevitable. There seems nothing to do now but make the best of it."

She appeared genuinely worried. He tried to change the subject.

"I was writing home," he explained.

"Then," she declared, "I should n't disturb you. When one is writing home one needs absolute quiet."

He was still standing. She thought he had a very soldier-like appearance. He really looked more like a soldier than an artist as she had conceived artists. Even his blond mustache had an aggressive military air. It was trimmed so short and cut so straight that it challenged the suggestion that it was there merely for ornament.

He returned quickly to the first subject.

"I myself did not by chance have anything of a musical education?" he asked.

"You?"

"Joe."

She laughed.

"No," she answered. "You refused to practice."

"It is just as well. Yet I remember the story of a French prisoner who to save his life, learned to play upon a trumpet in a single night."

"Luckily you won't need to do that but I think you could."

"Luckily for Mr. Langdon. Otherwise we should have a trio."

She had risen and was now nearing the door.

"Will you come in and listen to us?" she asked.

He reflected a moment to keep her longer by the door.

"No," he decided, "I think I 'll not, thank you."

"Carl seemed quite anxious to see more of you."

"I 'm afraid he will — the best I can do."

"I must run up and see if father is awake," she said and vanished.

With a sigh Barnes returned to his letter.

"I might paint her in an open doorway," he wrote, "upon the point of leaving. She would be half turned, posed in so light a fashion that the onlooker would be half afraid she was about to van-

ish from the canvas. She should appear startled as though hearing the approach of —"

He glanced up. Aunt Philomela stood in the doorway. He rose again. She paused uncertainly.

"Won't you come in?" he welcomed her bravely though she looked suspiciously as though loaded for bear.

"I thought Eleanor might be here," she observed, as though she expected him to feel guilty.

"She left only a moment ago," he answered frankly.

She appeared to be taking aim.

"I was writing home," he took her into his confidence to ward off as long as possible whatever might be coming.

"I thought artists had no homes."

"On the contrary they have more homes than anyone else."

"I suppose that depends upon your definition of a home," she suggested.

"Doubtless," he agreed.

"To my mind it is where one is brought up."

"Lord forbid," he gasped, thinking of the apartment houses.

"And where one's own kith and kin are."

"Then if one got married —"

"That is quite another matter," she snapped so

decisively as to forbid further argument along this line.

But one must have a subject, thought Barnes, or one could not tell what subject Chance might introduce. Aunt Philomela had the self-conscious air of one who has approached with a mission.

"I was writing home about a piece of work I have in mind."

"Work?" she asked with some scorn.

"A picture," he explained amiably, "there 's a lot of work in one."

"I 'm afraid you 'll have little time for it here."

"On the contrary, the inspiration for it came from here."

"I 've seen inspiration for nothing but deceit. I refused to tell him anything whatever about Alaska."

"Mr. Langdon, you mean?"

"Who else? I was left here alone an hour with him."

"It did make a bit of a complication, but it 's all adjusted now. I suppose I 'll have to tell all over again about three fingered Bill."

"This is disgraceful," she exploded, "I 've a good mind to confess the whole matter and have it done with."

"But it would n't be done with even if you did

that. It would be almost sure to reach Mr. Van Patten's ears."

"It would be better if it did. It 's the first time a Schuyler has not faced things squarely."

"Pardon me, but can't we just as well face the present situation squarely? We are working to save a father's mind — is n't that a situation to face squarely?"

"We 're forced into the position of deceiving him and not only him but a most estimable young man."

"Ah, a most estimable young man!"

"I should die of shame if ever Carl discovered our trickery."

"And your brother would die of grief if ever *he* discovered it. But he won't."

He turned upon her a bit nettled.

"Aunt Philomela," he said, "now that we have begun, we must play the game for all it 's worth. That is another thing the Schuylers have always done, have n't they? You and I and the estimable young man count for nothing in this. Do you think I would play it for myself alone?"

Aunt Philomela looked a bit chagrined.

"No," she said, "I suppose — I suppose we do owe you a great debt."

"You owe me nothing. I 'm well repaid by my inspirations and by a certain easing of my con-

The soft grass had muffled his approach so that for a moment she was unaware that she was not alone.

See page 19

science in a little family affair of my own. But even without those things I should still be repaid. And even if I were not repaid at all, I 'd again gladly undertake it. Only we must pull together, Aunt Philomela, and we must stick it out to the end."

"But," she trembled, "what is the end?"

"God knows," he answered.

She was edging towards the door.

"I — I spoke rather hastily," she half apologized.

"So did I." He smiled. "Often times we most easily tell the truth that way."

She vanished. Barnes returned to his letter.

"So you see," he wrote, "I have my hands full. I will write from time to time, but I 'm so uncertain in my movements that I can give no address. You may always know that I am busy and in good spirits.

Your son, Dick."

The second letter was more easily accomplished.

"DEAR FATHER, — I 'm head over heels in work and know that you are the same. I trust your work is counting for as much as mine. Hoping this will find you in your usual good health, I beg to remain,

Your prodigal son,

RICHARD."

As he scrawled the addresses, he heard the tuning of instruments in the sitting-room. He hastily sealed the envelopes and hurried out. The sun was just setting. The old brick house looked very mellow.

He walked to the tin mail-box and dropped in his letters.

CHAPTER IX

A LULLABY

As it happened, it was this very night that Barnes almost got a fair start upon his picture — almost found the inspiration to do it, as he expressed it, in a sort of gasp. One can no more foretell inspiration than one can Opportunity. Both come silently, unheralded, like angels and like angels stand dimly but a moment at the elbow and then vanish.

Barnes was sitting with Mr. Van Patten in the twilight. He had passed a pleasant and peaceful hour with the old gentleman while the latter had recalled a dozen little episodes of Joe's childhood. Barnes had nothing to do but remember. Did Barnes remember that time he had been taken down town and had his hair clipped? Did Barnes remember that time when they visited the circus and saw the elephant which he had thought wrong end to? Did Barnes remember that glad day and the other? He remembered them every one with no more effort than to review his own boyhood with his own father. It struck him as curious how much alike they were.

So with smile and chuckle and warm pressure of the hand, the father himself became a boy again and rambled on over many a tale of his own youth which in turn was again marvelously like that of Barnes' own youth. The mellow light hallowed the old man's white-bearded face; the homing birds twittered sleepily without; the drowsy chirp of the tree-toads and the warm chittering of the crickets led him into a content like that of the valley of shadows, though the sun still burned at the flamboyant horizon line.

From time to time the father napped only awake if Barnes stirred a muscle. Then he would feel about until he found the boy's hand again and settle back into a content born of utter trust. It gave a sober turn to Barnes' thoughts.

It was at this point that Mr. Van Patten awoke and called for Eleanor.

"Tell her I 'd like to have her play a little to me, Joe."

Glad of the relief, still gladder of this opportunity to bring her again upon the canvas, Barnes joyfully went below for her. The father had hit upon just what was needed at this hour. Nothing but music could harmonize the abrupt contrast of the aggressive beauty outside and the somber spectacle of this recumbent figure within. Never yet has there

been a sect so austere as to bar the sensuous strains of music even when serenest in the confidence of their prayers. Though they may modulate it to a hymn, though they may deaden it to a dirge, though they may refine it to a mere chant, still they cling to some wordless cadence to wing their prayerful words. Music was needed here though an almost religious peace prevailed.

Barnes found the girl seated beside her aunt in the sitting-room. If anyone could play to such an hour, to such a mood, he thought as he entered the room, it was she. She carried him back to some of the big unexplained moments of his life. One Sunday night in London he had come upon a group of Welshmen in Hyde Park who had gathered there to hold in the big city's vastest cathedral — the blue night sky above the Marble Arch — their homely services. Stubborn, angular men-shadows they were, grouped in close, with the burdened women-shadows hovering upon the outskirts. Without accompaniment of anything but their beating hearts, they lifted their sturdy voices in rough chorus — the gypsy melodies going back to Druid times when so their ancestors had stood half terrified by the unknown power they invoked amon the wiser trees. At the sound of it, Barnes had felt himself a part of all the centuries that had ever been and had risen to

a dignity of emotion which he had never felt since save at this moment he stood upon the threshold here to summon her to make music for the man above.

Wherein lay the connection? He could not say, save that it had something to do with her black hair; something with the vagueness of her outline in the shadows; something with the solemnity of that common human love which gropes for companionship with that common higher love. Emotions, like religions, gain something in power by remaining part mystery.

"Your father," Barnes announced, "wishes you to play for him."

She rose at once.

"Very well," she answered.

"And I may listen, too?" he asked.

"If you wish," she replied without embarrassment, "the things he likes are simple."

"The things I like are simple," he answered.

"Oh, dear," murmured Aunt Philomela, a note of fear in her voice. "They say it 's a bad sign when the sick call for music."

"I should say it was a good sign," said Barnes. "It proves them to be at peace."

"But is n't that a bad sign?"

"It depends upon your theory of life."

"It does n't seem normal, somehow," she answered with a little sigh.

"Why, Aunty," exclaimed the girl, "what has come over you? You know Daddy often asks me to play for him."

"But at this time of day! It 's sort of creepy."

"You 've sat too long in the dark," the girl declared, "I 'll have a candle brought unless you wish to join us."

"Oh, dear no. I could n't stand it. He always insists upon the dark and it is quite too — funereal."

"You must n't get morbid, Aunty."

Miss Van Patten stooped and kissed the cameo forehead and then rose and smoothed back the silken gray hair a moment.

"It is n't that. It is — "

Aunt Philomela did not finish. Whatever it was, Barnes found himself feeling uncomfortable for a moment. He knew that the old have certain senses which mercifully are denied the young.

Miss Van Patten stepped into the next room and returned with her 'cello. He reached to take it from her but she smiled a refusal and bore it up the stairs by her side as lightly as though it had no weight. It was as though she would trust it in no other hands but her own. This promised well.

"Come over here near me, Joe," the father requested as soon as they entered the room, "You have n't heard her since she was a little girl. She plays wonderfully."

So Barnes sat by the bedside while the daughter took a position near the open window. It was now quite dark. The twilight noises were hushed. One could imagine oneself anywhere and Barnes chose to go back to that still Spring night in Hyde Park when he had looked up at the stars and heard, for the first time, their music partly expressed.

There was no preliminary tuning to mar the first perfect note she drew from the instrument. There was scarcely a motion of the bow. It came deep-chested as though summoned by the mere caressing of the hand. She played first a serenade as graceful and as full of color as the doves darting about St. Marks; then a lighter Spanish air, and then Rath's "Leonore," and then swung off into a group of negro melodies which she herself had arranged. But neither to the older man nor to the younger man did the theme itself much matter — it served only to wing their thoughts. The underlying baritone voice of the 'cello lent to Barnes' imaginings eagle wings. He rode the winds with a sure power that lifted him above the heads of the huddled group of Welshmen — above the greater

huddled group called London, even to that brighter upper region where men and cities and nations count in the prospect not so much as the unpeopled mountains. There he beat the ether with his strong new-fledged wings and soared into some vague halcyon future. So he rose and fell and rose again among the clouds with the gentle undulations of the 'cello notes which swayed as rhythmically as heavy-leaved tree limbs to a breeze. But never did he rise so high that he was not conscious of the girl's figure in the dark. Always she was there; always she was the inspiration. He realized that it was from some such height as this that he must paint her. It seemed as though he could do it here now — in the dark. How would he do it? He smiled at his conceit. He would paint a canvas with such wizardry that to all those whose hearts were not in tune with it, it should appear to be only a rich purple background without figures. But to those who soared in the upper ether it should, as they looked, take form. First as their warm eyes rested upon it a shadow should emerge and gently materialize into the likeness of her. Then out of this her radiant face should appear. Then her white arm holding the bow, and then the scarcely perceptible outline of the 'cello and finally her black hair with gold in it. And if one were big enough of heart, one would

know that she was playing a barcarole and that another was listening.

If only he had his paints — if only he had his paints! One had only to hold one's breath and —

As he straightened, the father stirred uneasily. The girl had stopped and without speaking rested her cheek against the strings. He had lost his moment. His hand was unsteady when the old man found it.

"You are moved," murmured the father. "No wonder."

"No," answered Barnes below his breath, "it 's no wonder."

But now she took her bow again. She began a Southern lullaby — a lullaby with more of plaintive mother love in it than even the masters have ever caught. This time she added her voice — just breathing the words so that it was scarcely possible to tell whether it was she who was singing or the untongued instrument itself.

"H 'm — H 'm," she crooned, "H 'm — H 'm.
When I was a little baby
I remember long ago
Daddy would sit all ebnin'
An' play de ole banjo
Mammy den would call me 'Honey'
Take me upon her knee
An' foldin' me to her bosom
Would sing dis song to me."

As she began the chorus Barnes' own voice stole in to join her, whereupon she improvised an alto and left him to carry the air.

"Doan ye cry, ma honey
Doan ye weep no mo'
Mammy's gwine to hold her baby
All de udder black trash sleepin' on de flo'
Mammy only lubs her boy."

When they had finished and while the 'cello still hummed on, she whispered,

"He 's asleep. That song always lulls him to sleep."

She rose and beckoned him to follow. He turned to the old man. He was breathing regularly. He loosened his fingers and crept across the room, closing the door behind him. Miss Van Patten had waited for him at the head of the stairs.

"I shall never forget this hour," he said.

"I played the things he enjoys."

"What did the songs themselves matter?" he burst out.

"You two must be much alike," she smiled.

"No. If he went where you took me, he would n't be asleep."

She moved down the stairs. He checked her.

"I wish we could sit here — a moment. It seems wicked to go down into the light right off."

She glanced up a bit startled. He could see her eyes by the glow which came up from the sitting room.

"We must go down right away," she answered quickly. "Aunt Philomela is waiting for us."

He dared not insist further. Before he reached the bottom of the stairs he was sorry that he had ventured that far. It was to the lady of his picture he had spoken and she, this girl by his side, well she was not the lady of his picture.

They found Aunt Philomela asleep by the candle. Her hands were folded in her lap and her head was bowed.

"You see," whispered Miss Van Patten. "The music made her drowse too in spite of herself."

"What did you say?" inquired Aunt Philomela suddenly sitting up with the exaggerated look of wide awakeness of one who endeavors thereby to prove she has been wide awake all the time.

"I thought you were asleep," answered the girl, stepping into the room.

"Asleep?" she answered tartly, "with that thing buzzing in one's ears."

"I quite agree with you," smiled Barnes. "The 'cello is the last thing in the world to inspire sleep in the young."

"It makes the most melancholic of sounds," she sighed.

"There I *cannot* agree with you," returned Barnes. "It sings most optimistically to me."

"I prefer my music in the daytime," she affirmed.

"Perhaps your taste runs to duets," Barnes suggested.

Miss Van Patten had placed her instrument in the corner and was now returning.

"I think my niece plays very prettily with Carl," agreed Aunt Philomela.

Barnes tried to reach the girl's eyes. He could n't. He frowned.

"I heard them tuning up," he remarked. "They seemed to do that very well."

Aunt Philomela arose with that decisiveness which brooked no argument. It was disgracefully early to retire and yet he knew she had that in mind. And she would bear off the girl with her.

Which, with a curt good-night, she promptly did.

CHAPTER X

ON TROUT FISHING AND BOW-KNOTS

With what seemed to Barnes an inspired appetite, Mr. Van Patten expressed a wish for brook trout.

"Eleanor knows the stream," he said. "And perhaps you yourself would enjoy a little fishing."

"I 'd like nothing better," Barnes responded heartily. "I 'll see if she will go this afternoon."

Accordingly he began a still hunt for her and surprised her from ambush as she was passing through the living room.

"Your father wishes us to go fishing," he informed her bluntly lest she should disappear before he had time to announce the glad news.

"Oh dear, I have so much to do," she exclaimed.

"Are the duets on again this morning?" he inquired.

"No, it is n't that."

"Then?"

"Aunt Philomela is at her accounts. She becomes so confused when adding."

"I sympathize with her."

"In making up her column," she explained.

"Aunt insists upon putting down what each item is for; then she tries to add the items as well as the figures. Like adding parsnips and butter."

"They are very good when added in a frying-pan," he averred.

"But you can't add them in a column. She only does it towards the end."

"But your father's fish," he reminded her.

"Perhaps you would go alone?"

"I enjoy fishing," he answered with a sinking heart, "but that would n't bring your father a fish. I never have any luck. To-day we must be pot hunters and work for results."

"Well, if Daddy wishes a trout he ought to have one I suppose," she thought aloud.

"Undoubtedly," he declared.

"Then I 'll be ready in twenty minutes."

"May I dig the bait while you 're gone?" he inquired.

"The trout rise very well to flies," she informed him.

For which he was glad. He was not prudishly sensitive about such things but still he would not enjoy watching her impale a worm. It was a wriggling function that he himself did not particularly relish, less from humanitarian than æsthetic scruples.

She returned dressed in a short khaki skirt of hunting green, a wide-brimmed boy's straw hat and with a wicker fish-basket slung over her shoulder. Her feet were encased in high oiled boots. She stepped to the closet and brought out two rod cases, a book of flies, and two reels.

"Have you any choice of weight?" she asked holding out both rods.

"You 'd better give me the heavier one," he suggested off hand.

The most of his fishing had been done from a flat boat with a bamboo pole. Still he did not intend to admit to her such unsportsmanlike conduct. He knew nothing of fly fishing but he was determined to observe her closely and follow her example in every detail. When in college he had gone South with some friends for a week of bird shooting and had acquitted himself creditably by this method, though he had never before held a gun. In the same way, by his quickness and determination, he had ridden fifteen miles the first time he was ever upon a horse.

They left the house without seeing Aunt Philomela, though as he went down the path Barnes felt her eyes burning into his back. They crossed the road and pushed through the fields to the meadow-brook. They followed the banks for the matter of

half a mile before she finally stopped to put together the poles.

She glanced at the sky, at the water, and then ran her pink finger tips over the gorgeous medley of brightly-feathered flies. She selected one for herself and handed the book to him.

"I 'm trying a Silver Moth," she announced.

It took him longer to decide because there were no more Silver Moths, but he finally drew out a gay scarlet fly with a body of mottled brown. Its coloring was as daintily bright as that of a butterfly. He went upon the simple theory that if *he* were a trout it would be with some such fastidious temptation that he himself would coquet. He adjusted it slowly with one eye upon her.

She poised herself upon the edge of the bank with her figure erect, alert, every fine line pulsating with life. With a full, free arm movement she swung the lithe pole back, then forward. The Silver Moth circled her head, paused a moment ten yards behind her, and then following the swishing line darted straight out over the stream, swift as a homing bee and kissed the water with scarcely a ripple. She drew it back and this time sent it even farther. Then once again, until the long line reached almost to the opposite bank.

What a picture that would make! Diana with

her hounds was not half the subject. What gentle strength there was in every movement — what rhythm, and above the beautiful body, what a head. The wonder of those features was that they lived up to any part you wished to assume for them. A short while ago they had consistently upheld the traditions of Venice; still later they had blended into dusk dreams; now they expressed the elemental beauty of the Indian.

As the Silver Moth rippled against the current, she turned to see what he was about. She saw and turned back again to the Silver Moth.

"What fly are you using?" she inquired.

"A butterfly," he answered with an intake of breath.

Then he roused himself and contrived to get the bit of feather into the water, though he was glad she did not observe the process.

He offered up a silent invocation:

"Oh, trout, king of all your fellows come to my hook and I will hallow your death with prayers of thanksgiving. Set me well before her eyes and I vow never to disturb your finny kingdom again."

Had he only anticipated such an emergency as this he would have given over the hours he had wasted so idly in dreams all these years, to the perfecting himself in the art of casting a fly. There

were those days in London; he saw now that he could have used the Thames to much better advantage than in merely gazing at its dull fogs; there was the Seine, and he had stood lazily upon its banks for hours content in watching the little barges puff up and down.

He felt a ferocious tug at his line. Before he recovered from his surprise a speckled red body flung itself from the water and, striking it again in a churning splash, cut an arrow-like course down stream. He felt as though the line were knotted about his heart. He knew well enough that now the thing to do was to keep the line taut.

"At any cost," he muttered grimly.

"You 've hooked him!" he heard her voice.

That was not quite accurate; the trout had hooked himself. But if there was any grace in the strong will of a man he would keep him hooked.

She withdrew her line to give him plenty of room and to watch him. There are few things a man cannot do if the right woman is watching him. He fought the big trout back and forth, anticipating by instinct every sudden turn, every inshore dart, every upstream flash. The line did not slacken a quarter of an inch. Foot by foot he forced the speckled beauty towards the bank. He was not

even deceived when for a second the fish lay passive a second and then darted towards the shelter of a group of bowlders. He checked him within the very shadow of this hiding-place. Then inch by inch he reeled again, dragging him in relentlessly towards his hand.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "We should have brought the landing-net. But we don't often have use for it in these waters."

He drew the line still closer towards his itching fingers. He grasped it. He gave it a tug and in another second had tossed upon the grass the largest trout ever taken from Schuyler brook.

She clapped her hands in applause.

"He 's a beauty," she cried enthusiastically.

"Pretty fair," he confessed modestly.

"And you handled him so well!" she praised.

"Thank you."

"And to think you captured him with a Scarlet Beauty. I have never been able to get a rise with that fly."

"On a bright day," he replied sagely, "and in slow waters, they seem to work very well."

"Your judgment was sound," she admitted.

"It was the judgment of the gods."

"Then the gods are certainly with you."

"They are," he confessed brazenly.

"I think I shall change my fly," she determined. "What should you advise?"

He picked out for her a pretty tasseled thing which contained a touch of crimson such as was on his.

"I'd try this," he counseled. "And I shall stand by and see how it works."

"But you're going to fish too?"

"No. I've discharged my filial duties. Your father has his trout."

"Then we must get one for Aunt Philomela."

"I must refrain. I'm under certain obligations."

"Obligations?" she questioned.

"To my prize. To the king," he answered waving his hand airily towards the gasping fish.

Acting upon this, he, to her wonder, packed up his rod, placed his trout in the basket, and took a comfortable seat a little to the right of her.

Truly the gods were with him. Had they not listened to his invocation? Otherwise he must have stood upon the bank and given over his whole thought to the matter of casting a bit of feather upon the waters. He could have studied the sky only as it was reflected in the stream, and only as much of her as he could catch from the corner of his eye. And always there would have been the

danger of an entangling alliance between his hook and her gown with the consequent embarrassment of showing ill before her. He must have been born under Pisces.

Again and again she cast her line for Aunt Philomela without success. But what Aunt Philomela lost, he gained. He won a new memory of her at every strong-limbed movement. He prayed for failure. Surely, he thought, that estimable lady would cheerfully surrender the mere item of a delectable morsel or two for such pictures as these.

But Miss Van Patten herself did not relish the position as much as she might. She was conscious of being watched and this, unless a girl be vain, is not pleasant no matter how delicately the watching is done. So she slowly reeled in her line.

"Surely, you don't mean to deprive Aunt Philomela of her fish?" he hastened to protest.

"I think she would rather have me finish her accounts," she affirmed.

"If we tried a few moments longer —"

"I have noticed," she declared, continuing to reel in her line, "that when at the beginning you land a big fish, the little fishes cease to bite."

He felt guilty, as though he had been the means of depriving her of her sport. As she left the bank

he took her pole and dismembered it for her, prolonging the task as long as possible. He wished now that he had not caught his fish so soon. The ideal way to fish with her, he thought, would be to have a trout concealed in one's pocket and so with no responsibility dabble with the fly until the opportune moment for going home arrived and then deftly hook the fish upon the line and produce it. The pity of life was that no sooner had one prettily solved some problem by experience than the opportunity for using it was gone. It might well be that Mr. Van Patten would never have again so convenient a taste for trout.

Barnes was in hope that perhaps she might seat herself, if he were long enough about this business of packing up the rods, but she did n't. She watched him with interest but with no other thought in mind than returning to the house as soon as he was ready. So with a little sigh, he finally tied the cloth case at the top in a knot that no human being could ever separate without the use of a knife.

"I never can untie that," she protested.

"All you have to do," he assured her with honest conviction, "is to pull the loop string."

"Don't you know how to make a real bow-knot?" she asked.

"Is n't that a bow-knot?"

A bow-knot has two loops and comes untied," she informed him.

"I thought the object of a knot was to remain tied. Mine have at least that advantage."

"But you want them to untie sometime."

"You cut mine when you wish to undo them," he explained.

"That is both wasteful and untidy. I will show you."

Here was a lesson worth learning. He handed her the rod. She pulled gingerly at the string but only succeeded in fixing the knot more firmly than ever. She removed a pin from her hat and began to pick. It was a long process but it gave him time to admire the nimbleness of her fingers. The knot became loosened only too soon.

"There," she exclaimed. "Now you take it so and you do like this."

It was tied in the snap of a finger.

"Then, when you pull one end of either string, it becomes unfastened."

She demonstrated. He took the rod and tried the same process clumsily. She came nearer and guided his fingers. He caught the perfume of her hair. It was like dying clover. He felt the electric thrill of her fingers. It only made him the clumsier.

She gave up in despair.

"You will never learn," she declared.

"I can always try."

"You must practice by yourself."

"I have done so for years."

"Then," she said, "you must never tie any but your own things."

"Then," he reflected, "anything that I wish to tie hard, I must first own."

But he did n't own the rod, so she tied that herself. As they rose to go Carl approached.

"Hello," he called, "fishing?"

"No," answered Barnes, "hunting."

CHAPTER XI

ON ADVENTURING

Carl was asked to supper and Mr. Van Patten insisted that the prize should be cooked for the guest. The king trout was avenged for his fate. Yet there could be no denying that he made a pretty dish. Through the crackling skin, thin as gold-leaf, the scarlet speckles still showed, so that, garnished with parsley as he was, he looked as content upon the platter as though he were still nosing through water-cress in his native element.

Carl was placed opposite Miss Van Patten, and Barnes was thus left to face Aunt Philomela.

"I trust your accounts balanced," he ventured to inquire of her.

"Within a peck of potatoes," answered Aunt Philomela indifferently.

"That I should say was doing very well."

"For an artist, perhaps."

"Accounts are an awful bother," Carl chipped in.

"We waste so much time," said Barnes. "We waste so much time in details. When all is said and done what is a peck of potatoes?"

"Never cared for potatoes," vouchsafed Carl.

"Where would our accounts be if we permitted such slipshod methods as yours?" Aunt Philomela challenged Barnes.

"Lord, they'd be always as they are," he replied lightly. "I've noticed that if you'll allow it, your creditors do all the figuring for you."

"For themselves rather," snapped Aunt Philomela.

"It comes to the same in the end," he opined.

"Even so, it's just as well to retard the process."

"The sooner they get it, the less they trouble you."

"Then where would you be?" she demanded.

"You'd be in the hole," nodded Carl.

"Lord, you'd be just where you were to start with," Barnes affirmed grandly. "Creditors can't disturb *you*. They can only get your money."

"That may be all very well for an artist," Aunt Philomela answered darkly, as though at best artists were but jail-birds.

Carl was devouring his portion of the trout with evident relish.

"You're a great fisherman, Joe," he complimented.

"Thank you."

Barnes turned back to Aunt Philomela.

"Artists are human," he declared, "perhaps a little more human than other humans."

Miss Van Patten put in a word.

"I don't see why artists are always placed in a class by themselves."

"Quite right," agreed Barnes. "The distinction is a purely arbitrary one. If there is any class, it belongs to the others — to the green-grocer and his peck of potatoes."

"You 're an artist then?" inquired Carl in surprise.

Barnes himself was a bit surprised.

"All honest men are artists," he replied vaguely.

"And all honest men keep their accounts," stuck in Aunt Philomela.

"If they have any to keep. I doubt if strictly honest men have any."

"Are you a Socialist?" inquired Carl.

"No. I keep an account with myself. If I don't use figures, why I lie awake longer at night."

"And don't care whether you come out right or not," snapped Aunt Philomela.

"Your true artist cares more than anyone else in the world how he comes out," he answered soberly.

"But the potatoes —"

"The potatoes. When all is said and done what

is a peck of potatoes? I am like Mr. Langdon, I don't care for them."

"But you are n't like me about trout. You don't seem to care for trout."

"I enjoy catching them at least. Perhaps I 'm like my sister in that."

He turned to Miss Van Patten.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I 've been hopelessly beaten in my own waters."

"I suppose you had plenty of sport in Alaska," broke in Carl.

"In Alaska?" answered Barnes absent mindedly.

"With four fingered William," Aunt Philomela hastily reminded him.

"Oh, yes. Of course."

"Polar bear and — such things?" persisted Carl.

"Exactly. Polar bear and such things."

There was a long pause. Barnes stubbornly refused to expound. Miss Van Patten came to the rescue. She asked Carl about the new song he was composing. That answered through the dessert, but with the cheese and coffee Carl turned once more upon Barnes.

"I suppose you had a rough time of it where you came from. Nothing like this, was it?"

"Where I came from — no."

"Snow everywhere I suppose. Nothing green?"

"From the house where I lived, you could n't see a sprig of green," Barnes answered truthfully.

"Jove, it must be a desolate country."

"Ghastly."

"And everyone grubbing for gold, eh?"

"Every mother's son doing nothing else. Night and day; day and night. It 's all they think of — where I came from."

"Must be depressing."

"It 's killing."

Aunt Philomela was following every word breathlessly. The girl, too, held herself ready to rush into the breach should there be need.

"You did n't like it then?" asked Carl.

"No. That 's why I left."

"I suppose a lot of men don't get much out of it even after putting up with all the hardships."

"Nothing. I know a man who has cleaned up two million dollars without getting anything out of it."

"Jove. A friend of yours?"

"A sort of friend," answered Barnes.

He referred to his father. What *had* he got out of it? He was tied hand and foot in a gingerbread apartment house. His two million had

never given him an hour like that by the trout-brook.

"I suppose," suggested Carl, "it 's the spell that makes them stand it — a sort of mountain Lorelei."

Barnes started.

"That would n't make a bad theme for an opera," mused Carl.

Barnes turned to him with renewed interest.

"Have you ever done anything in that line?" he asked.

A new light came into Langdon's face at the question.

"Not yet."

"You hope to?"

Langdon flushed boyishly.

"This summer has made me hope," he answered quietly.

Aunt Philomela rose. Out of a full heart Barnes silently thanked her.

"I suppose you two will practice to-night?" she asked her niece.

Barnes waited for the answer. Miss Van Patten turned to Carl.

"I'd like to," he answered, "but I promised Dr. Merriweather to play to him after supper."

Barnes no longer begrudged him the brook-trout. When shortly after Carl took his departure Barnes

felt actually glad that he had been the humble means of furnishing him so good a supper.

"Let 's go out and see the after-glow," he suggested as standing on the door step with Miss Van Patten, he saw Carl turn the corner, by the letter-box.

She was upon the point of hesitating when he led the way in so determined a manner that after throwing a shawl about her shoulders, she followed. He trampled a trail through the knee-deep grass to the summit in the rear of the house. Below them lay a sweep of undulating hills unbroken to the horizon line.

At the edge of the world a mass of clouds impersonated the Alps — towering to an impressive height above the purple hills. Their whiteness was tinted with pink and one of them burned with a ghostly fire. Above these, in flat strips, lay ribbons of old-rose and greenish-yellow, while still higher the sky was a golden haze. For a moment they stared in silence at the gorgeous picture. Then he declared,

"That looks like Alaska."

"It 's hard for me to realize that you have n't really been in Alaska," she said. "You make it all so vivid."

"I 'm willing to let my proxy attend to the ac-

tuality," he answered, "but I thank him for transferring his dreams to me."

"I'm afraid Joe never dreamed very beautifully. The dreams are all your own."

"He must have dreamed some," he mused, "or he would n't have undertaken the journey."

"He dreamed of gold, perhaps."

"Well, a dream is always a dream. There 's some good in a man who will go adventuring even for gold."

"But the object of the quest makes some difference," she insisted.

"Undoubtedly. Though not as much as you would think. It 's the way a man handles the obstacles to his quest that counts."

"Then for that matter a man might go adventuring in his own house," she suggested.

"Or along a country road."

"Because," she explained, "there are obstacles everywhere."

"It would be a dull world without them. Your greatest adventurer after all is a child. De Soto never ran the gauntlet of half the thrilling hazards that confront an infant in his toddling course from the nursery to the garden-gate. And if the gate is a-swing and he is successful in reaching the saffron road, he has before him an open

field that might well make Pizarro pause and gasp."

"You almost tempt one to start upon a quest," she laughed.

"You 've probably already started," he affirmed. "Everyone starts as soon as he finds his feet."

"But the joy of it lies in the consciousness of it," she suggested.

"Exactly."

He was silent for a moment. Their eyes met at a focus point in the fiery clouds at the edge of the earth.

"Next to children, lovers are your true adventurers," he declared.

She offered no opinion upon this, but turned her head a little to the right, away from him. The sunset appeared in her cheeks.

"Your true lover," he went on, pursuing his own fancy, "when footing the soft grass of a country lane is, in reality, blazing a trail through the tangled everglades of Florida. He is in search of the Fountain of Youth. He is on a voyage of discovery as momentous as that of Columbus for he, too, is after a new world. Your lover, even at home, is ever challenging the rugged heights of Alaska in search of hidden gold."

She kept her eyes fixed upon the burning West.

"And the dangers he faces?"

"My soul, the dangers!" exclaimed Barnes. "The dangers are innumerable and terrifying. If he stumbles on so much as a phrase, he is plunged into a chasm of despair a mile deep. On every side he is confronted by icy glaciers of reserve that half hide the stars in his firmament. If he swerve one whit from the straight path, he is involved in a tangle of misunderstandings. Hostile Indians of the tribe Jaloux attack him at every point. If he move too fast, he is torn to shreds by rebuking thorns; if he go too slow, he perishes and no one mourns. Fever and thirst and heart hunger are his. In ambush lie shaggy bears of prejudices, wild hyenas of relatives, and —"

"Don't," she laughed uneasily, "you quite frighten one."

"This falling in love is no small matter," he avowed.

"You would not think then that so many men would venture."

"You would not think that so many men would go to sea in boats; you would not think that so many men would go to wars; you would not think that so many men would try to paint."

The sky was like a burnished gold floor; was

like the yellow sand that lies below Indian waters. The world looked marvelously serene to her. And yet she felt as though the West were calling her. It was as though a soft hand had suddenly been put within hers and were tenderly drawing her towards the sunset. When she turned back to the house, it was as though she were turning away from something. The brick house looming before her in the dusk gave less a promise of shelter than of restriction. The walls which had always given her a peaceful sense of security, now appeared more like those of a retaining castle. It is an odd illusion which can turn a fortress into a prison. It is equaled only by that which turns a prison into a fortress.

It is small wonder that it leaves a maiden thoughtful. It is small wonder that so slight a matter as the closing of an old Dutch door behind her, is enough to bring her heart up into her throat.

CHAPTER XII

STRATEGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Barnes' position in the library was a strategic one. It gave him an excuse for not venturing out on so fair a morning, after his usual hour with Mr. Van Patten; it saved him from the necessity of lounging in the sitting room and so revealing too obviously his object in remaining indoors; and it afforded him a point of vantage to intercept Miss Van Patten from time to time as she passed up and down-stairs on her important housewifely missions. Incidentally it gave him time to muse and still more incidentally to acquire a variety of statistics which he hoped to use this evening as defense guns in the assault he anticipated from Dr. Merriweather on his none too impregnable position. For Aunt Philomela had astounded them both by announcing that she had asked the doctor to dinner that evening. So far, Barnes had been successful in evading the man, for from all he had heard he would find it no easy matter to hoodwink this big-hearted country doctor.

He made his first sortie as Miss Van Patten

passed the door on her way with orders to the cook. She wore a small white apron as finely embroidered as a muslin kerchief. In her hand she held a pad and pencil. Any one could see with half a glance that she had no time to waste.

"Oh, Eleanor," he exclaimed, rushing out.

At sound of her name she grew confused and stopped as short as though an emergency brake had been applied.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, not realizing until then the impetuosity of his attack. "I beg your pardon, but Alaska contains five hundred and eighty-six thousand square miles."

"Really?"

"I thought you ought to know."

"Perhaps I 'd better write it down."

She scribbled it on the top of her pad and later amazed the cook by ordering five hundred and eighty-six thousand pounds of roast.

"It 's a surprising fact, is n't it?" he exclaimed.

It certainly had surprised her if that is what he meant.

"I did n't know Alaska was so large," she admitted.

"Nor I. But it is. You can see it here on the map."

He hurried back to the map and standing over

it pointed melodramatically in such a way that one could not help but examine unless one wished to appear rude.

"It goes from here to here and here to here," he explained as she came nearer. "It was bought from Russia for seven million, two hundred dollars. The deal proved that the nation had become essentially Yankee. I think some of my ancestors must have been mixed up in it."

"Your father is a business man?"

"The apotheosis of a business man. He reckons his age in fiscal years. Business to his life is what the cook-stove is to the kitchen; it warms and feeds him. Take it away and the world would contain nothing but useless pots and kettles and a few raw materials. The only concession he makes to Art is to put a scroll upon the cook-stove door. It was from that scroll that I received my own humble inclination towards Art."

"I 'm afraid your father would think you wasting your time here," she said anxiously.

"My father thinks I waste all my time," he assured her. "But that is because he does n't know. I rather think he would give me credit for doing a little better than usual at present."

"I wish it were possible to return to him your kindness to my father."

"Perhaps," he faltered, "the opportunity will come."

"If it would," she cried eagerly.

"I 'll let you know if it does," he replied.

She raised her eyes to his. Then she lowered them. For a fraction of a second she felt as she had when the Dutch door closed upon her.

"I 'm beginning to marvel," he mused, "how often the little incidents of life turn out to be the big ones. Every decision we make is like drawing at straws held in the hand of Fate. The ends are all even and we can't tell until afterwards — years afterwards, perhaps — whether we have drawn the short straw or the long straw."

Without at all thinking what she was about, she wrote upon her pad, "Long straw."

"And we draw," he concluded, "every minute of our lives."

While her eyes were lowered upon the paper (she was working a scroll about the sentence) he leaned forward a little. Three days ago Fate had held out to him two straws; one was the road to the next village, the other was the road to this house. He had drawn, he thought, the short one, but was it so? Was it so?

"You make life seem such a breathless affair," she was saying.

"It is such a wonderful affair," he answered.

"It had always seemed to me here rather humdrum."

"And now?"

"The sunsets," she faltered, "the sunsets are such nesting-places of fancies."

"So is everywhere; so is this old library."

"But the kitchen," she put in quickly, "is a place of stern realities. I must go at once."

No one could leave more abruptly when her mind was upon it. Before he had gathered his wits together she had gone.

"It is," he determined with a sigh, "the curse of the cook-stove. The Acme has worked its spell again."

With the map before him, he settled himself to explore more in detail this new country which lay immediately before him. In this the map itself did not help him except to afford a convenient resting-place for his elbows.

It was clear to him now that he had inadvertently stumbled upon the center of the universe. It was rather odd that geographers had neglected to point out so significant a feature. To the north lay the North, to the south lay the South, to the east the East, to the west the West. Start in any direction, continue in a straight line, and one would come

back here. It was a demonstrable fact. He had no doubt that even if one pursued a circuitous and zigzag path, the result would be the same. One could no more escape it than can the compass the magnetic north. Had he himself not reached this point over that devious winding course which started at his cradle?

He heard her footsteps and charged his guns with another fact.

"Do you know," he announced as she approached the library door on her way back upstairs, "do you know that Alaska is approximately as large as all the United States east of the Mississippi river, if we subtract the areas of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and West Virginia?"

"Really?" she observed again.

"I suppose," he reflected, "that if you subtracted some more, it would then be twice as large as something else."

"I suppose they wish to make it look as large as they can," she remarked.

"You can see it on the map," he urged.

He crossed the room to the atlas and she had nothing to do again but follow.

"All that pink space," he announced as grandly as though he owned it.

"How interesting," she murmured.

"There are a great many facts in a geography," he declared, "which are n't generally known."

"There are certainly a great many facts about Alaska which even geographers don't know," she laughed.

"Also about this place. Geographers are very ignorant."

"You did n't expect to find Chester on the map."

"But I *did* find it," he avowed.

"You did? May I see it?"

"Certainly. Take my place here."

She seated herself in his chair and leaned forward expectantly.

"Now," he instructed, "rest your elbows on the atlas and close your eyes."

"Oh," she exclaimed in confusion at having fallen into his trap.

"One understands geography a great deal better with you in the room," he confessed.

"But I should n't be in the room," she cried. "I was on my way to Aunt."

She rose at once, but this time he covered her retreat.

"Have you written down what I just told you?" he asked.

"I don't think I shall write down any more," she

answered, remembering the mistake she had made to the cook.

She was almost as tall as he and yet he could not see her eyes.

"Aunt is waiting for me," she explained.

"That is a safe statement to make at any time, is n't it?"

"But this is very important; I am to see about the dusting."

"I don't believe you can find any dust in the house."

"But it is necessary to dust just the same."

"Just as one prays when there is n't anything to pray about," he suggested.

"Or talks when there is n't anything to talk about," she answered.

Whereupon he promptly stood aside and allowed her to pass.

At the door she turned.

"I did n't mean that," she apologized. "I 'd stay if —"

He moved towards her. She ran upstairs.

It seemed an eternity before she appeared again. He hurried to the door.

"Alaska has a population of thirty-five thousand white people," he announced. "There are a lot of us up there."

She was armed with a feather duster.

"I am to do the library," she made the much more significant announcement. "The servants are all busy."

"There is nothing like giving the servants a great deal of work," he declared enthusiastically.

"While I 'm doing this," she remarked, "you may instruct me about Alaska."

She moved at once upon the book-case. Her arms were guarded by sleeve-protectors of a pink and white apple-blossom design.

"You must n't think," he made a beginning, "that gold is the only interest there. In the fiscal year of 1908 the merchandise shipments alone amounted to roughly twenty-six million, eight hundred and seventy-five thousand, three hundred and seventy-three dollars."

"What is a fiscal year?" she inquired.

"The sorriest of all years; the twelve month space between dollar marks. I don't remember that I ever had one."

"I think Aunt Philomela must have them. I forgot to tell you that her accounts came out right, in the end."

"I had no doubt they would," he said.

He watched her a moment.

"I wonder just what the economic value of stirring up dust is," he mused.

She turned upon him.

"You don't want your library to look as though you never used it, do you?"

"One might use a library," he suggested, "without ever disturbing the books."

"It is a convenient place to practice in," she admitted.

"Oh. Are you to practice your duets to-day?"

"I wrote Carl that I should be too busy. And he wished to play me his new song."

"At first I should have said it was impossible for him to write a song, but now — I think I see how he does it."

"He has a great deal of talent."

"I liked the way his eyes lighted up at thought of a possible opera," he admitted frankly.

"He says he can't think of you as a business man," she laughed.

"Why not?"

"Because," she faltered, "he says — you inspire him."

"I?"

She nodded.

"But say — that's odd. I wonder how *I* inspire him?"

"He says you make him see the tragedy of those men up North. He says —" she hesitated.

"Well?"

"He said he thought you must have had some big tragedy in your own life."

"Of what nature?" he inquired with interest.

"Some big disappointment."

She appeared confused.

"Of what nature?" he persisted.

"Oh, I should n't have told you. I don't suppose I ought."

He looked thoughtful.

"Some disappointment in love?" he questioned.

She nodded.

He drew a deep breath.

"Well," he said, "he 's wrong."

"Yes?" she asked indifferently.

"Absolutely. It may be in store for me, but it has n't come yet."

"We can't any of us tell what is in store for us," she said quickly.

"No. It might be in store for him, too, might n't it?"

"For Carl?"

"I hope not," he said soberly. "I think that must be the biggest possible tragedy in anyone's life."

"So it is n't very safe to go adventuring, is it?" she suggested.

"Safe? No. But it is n't much of a man who won't — for all that."

"I have finished my dusting," she announced, suddenly moving towards the door.

"No," he protested. "You ought n't to neglect those books in the corner."

"You said they did n't matter."

"I have changed my mind."

"Anyhow I can't waste any more time."

"Waste? Waste?" he exclaimed.

But she had gone.

CHAPTER XIII

A SURPRISE

Promptly at seven the candles were lighted upon the dinner-table where they burned in sacrificial splendor in the midst of an offering fit for Ceres. At seven one, Aunt Philomela swept in gowned in purple silk, resplendent in the family jewels; at seven five Miss Van Patten appeared and put the family jewels to shame. She was in something as light as mist. It fell from her neck and hung like spray about her ankles. At seven ten the doctor's gig drove up and a hearty "Whoa" announced the doctor himself like a bugle blast. At seven fifteen, the preliminary embarrassment of the introduction was over and Barnes' back smarting under the gruff greeting. At seven twenty the doctor returned from a brief visit upstairs and John produced himself in the majesty of full regalia.

It was not until the soup was served that Barnes found himself in a position to size up the genial enemy. Among other reasons he was too elated over the necessity that had forced Aunt Philomela to seat him opposite her niece. Barnes saw a heavy

man of sixty with a round tanned face, and hands of remarkable beauty. They were tender hands backed by arms that might have been those of a Flemish warrior. In a dozen ways the bluff doctor made him think of those who fought in Flanders and secured immortality, not so much by their deeds, strangely enough, as by the canvases of those who depicted them. The burly physician might have been the result of some subtle blending of the poet artist and his warrior model; of the brush and the sword. Give him a rolling hat with a feather in it, and he could take his place beside Porthos; put a brush in his hand and he would have passed for Rembrandt. At the sick bed of children the women gave over, unquestioning, the joy of their travail to those hands — recognizing them as even more tender than their own.

It took but a glance to see what he must mean to the country-side. No ice-laden wind which ever blew would be strong enough to stand between him and a cry of pain or the moan of a fevered soul. It was enough if he himself came; it did not so much matter whether he brought his vials or no.

Barnes found the situation more disconcerting than he had anticipated. His self-confidence deserted him. He had no heart to play upon this big man's credulity. Rather would he take him

into his confidence; rather would he speak fairly to those blue eyes resting in their nest of wrinkles. Here was a man used to seeing the unshrouded souls of his fellows. He was doctor, priest, and lawyer, and when these three get together in one man there is a great dropping off of cloaking rags. Such a man must see terrible things; at times beautiful things.

"Boy," exclaimed the doctor, "you've done more for your father in three days than I've been able to do in three months. You ought to have come a year ago."

"If I'd known what I now know I *would* have come," answered Barnes.

Aunt Philomela glanced up sharply. But she was not in her usual spirit. Her heart was in her mouth.

"When a man gets old he clings to his own," declared the doctor. "It is as natural as for youth to reach for the new."

"At any age," opined Aunt Philomela, "there is nothing like one's own flesh and blood."

"Not so," objected the doctor, "if my son didn't stand by his sweetheart against me I'd disown him."

Barnes felt his heart warming towards this man at once.

"There 's Carl," pursued the doctor with a wink at Eleanor, "he 's reaching out — reaching out."

Barnes turned to his soup.

"That is different," answered Aunt Philomela.

The doctor swallowed his soup red hot.

"Boy," he broke out, "you have been where I would go if I were thirty years younger. I 've too many children here to look after or I might go now. Tell me about the place."

Barnes glanced up. John had stepped into the kitchen.

"You refer to Alaska?" he asked quietly.

"Alaska," answered the doctor.

"I have never been there in my life," was Barnes' astounding reply.

For a moment there was that stillness which presages the hurricane; a hush of such intensity that it seemed as though the inanimate objects participated — a silence so close as to be stifling. Then Aunt Philomela dropped her spoon. The girl started. The doctor's brows contracted. Barnes sipped his soup.

"Perhaps I did not understand you," hazarded Dr. Merriweather.

"I said I have never been in Alaska in my life," Barnes repeated in as matter of fact a tone as he might have commented on the weather.

The doctor turned to Miss Schuyler. The latter could not have pronounced her own name.

"Then," inquired the doctor, "am I to understand that you 're an impostor?"

"Nothing else," admitted Barnes, "but," he added, anxiously glancing towards the buttery, "you must n't let the servants know."

"Perhaps you 're not even Mr. Van Patten's son?"

"I am no relation whatever," confessed Barnes.

"Eleanor," gasped Aunt Philomela weakly.

The girl turned and smiled upon her. After the first shock, she strangely enough was the only composed one of the group. She was not only composed but elated.

"Let me explain," begged Barnes, facing the doctor squarely. "After all, it 's a simple ruse; the boy Joe would not come, and so to save Mr. Van Patten from the shock of this news, I volunteered. The deceit has worked perfectly; he suspects nothing, and is, as you saw, a happy man."

"Well," muttered the doctor, "so that explains it."

His face began to brighten and continued until it had expanded into a broad grin. With this expression he again confronted Aunt Philomela, whose cheeks had turned a fiery red.

"Aunty Schuyler," he declared, "I didn't think it was in you."

"I know that it — it was contemptible, but I — I couldn't help it," she faltered.

"Contemptible!" he exploded. "It's great!"

He turned to Barnes and stretched out his big arm across the table.

"Boy, your hand upon it!"

Barnes seized the hand, and that firm grip, if nothing else, made it seem all worth while.

"Aunt Philomela — " began Barnes, still anxious to absolve Miss Schuyler.

But the doctor interrupted him with a loud laugh. He threw back his head and laughed as he had not laughed in twenty years.

"She told me a yarn that was pretty hard to swallow," he roared, "but, Lord, it was a good one."

"Don't," she pleaded.

"She told me about Billy who had lost four fingers, and — "

"Le voilà," interrupted Barnes, swinging upon Aunt Philomela, "I warned you to be accurate."

Miss Van Patten reached under the table and found Aunt Philomela's trembling hand.

"And you made it all up as you went along?" demanded the doctor, the tears starting in his eyes. "You did it off hand?"

"No," broke in Barnes. "Truly she must be exonerated. She only repeated what I told her. She was quite forced into it."

"Don't spoil it," pleaded the doctor, waving him back. "Don't take her laurels! I've told her often enough that the only thing she lacked was imagination."

But at this moment John entered, and Barnes raised a warning finger to his lips.

"Don't let John know. It might get upstairs."

"Mum's the word," agreed the doctor, trying hard to stifle his chuckles.

He whispered across the table,

"Aunty Schuyler — after dinner — more! More!"

But Barnes saw that it was high time to check the merriment. The little old lady looked to be upon the point of leaving. She took the situation far too seriously. So he deftly turned the doctor away from the subject to a theme he had long since discovered to be a vital one in the country, — the rights of automobiles on country roads.

"If I had my way," the doctor exploded, rising to the bait at once, "I'd fine 'em a hundred dollars for going over four miles an hour."

"But in your profession you find them useful?" inquired Barnes, though he knew from the

way the doctor had shouted "Whoa" as he entered the yard that he was too loyal to his horse to admit such slander.

"Bah! D'ye think I'd risk my patient's life to say nothing of my own in one of the things? When I start I want to be sure of getting there. What d'ye think I'd have done last night at Mrs. Van Dusen's with only a minute to spare?"

Aunt Philomela glanced up with interest.

"A boy," he informed her.

Her eyes warmed.

Barnes drew him on further to tell of some of the cases in the neighborhood in which Aunt Philomela was interested. This turned out to be an inexhaustible theme and revealed the fact that in the work of relief organization Aunt Philomela was the doctor's good right arm. The two of them were evidently a self-appointed board of charities for the village. Aunt Philomela lost herself in the discussion, so that her spirits soon revived again. In fact, with the weight of the secret off her mind, she appeared even more vivacious than usual, which left Barnes, although still obliged to listen attentively with his eyes, free to follow his own thoughts. And Miss Van Patten, though she apparently hung upon every word that was spoken, was no less free to pursue the trend of her own thoughts.

And both were conscious that each was doing this.

There are blessed limits as to how far this matter of chaperonage may be carried. Given two people well in tune with one another and it is doubtful if it amounts to very much. There are instances of two who, at opposite ends of a crowded church, have successfully found one another, and in consequence heard but little of the sermon. There are those who, in the midst of a vast crowd with the band playing and people huzzaing, have felt themselves as secluded as in a country lane.

It is certain that Barnes found himself conversing quite freely with her who, leaning forward, was giving such attention to her aunt. No words were spoken, to be sure, for there was no need of words.

"You appear more beautiful to-night than I 've ever seen you," he began boldly, if silently.

"What has that to do with the matter?" she answered without moving her lips.

Barnes for the moment felt venturesome.

"As an artist," was his reply, "it 's my duty to take such details into account. Your eyes match marvelously well with the candle-light."

"Your calling does n't give you the privilege of being bold."

"So long as the boldness is born of truth. Your hair, too, is as . thousand candles burning in the night."

"You are thinking of my mother's hair."

"Because I see your hair as your father saw your mother's hair when the two were young."

"Father was pleased by the tender way you spoke to him of mother."

"My heart was dangerously tender as through you I saw your mother."

"You think of danger — ever?"

"I fear at times, but I cannot tell whether it is for myself or for you."

"What is there to fear for me?"

"I wish you would answer that yourself."

"I cannot. You must answer all questions you ask of me."

"Aye, and they must be answered before they are asked. But I will ask one; — what makes your cheeks so red just now?"

"Because the blood mounts high in them."

"Whence comes the blood?"

"From the heart, to be sure."

"The heart must be over eager. Why is that?"

"That is a question for Dr. Merriweather."

"He might know more about it than most doctors. But when all is said and done what

a pitiful little your surgeon knows about the heart."

"What a pitiful little anyone knows," she answered.

The hum of the doctor's talk went on. Barnes, as he watched the girl, caught her gaze.

"I wonder what sort of a picture you are painting of me?" he asked. "I see you dipping the brush of your long lashes into the pigment of your eyes."

"You may be sure that whatever it is, it is not for exhibition."

"I should be half afraid to view it, if it were."

"Doubtless you would criticise it. But it is not half done."

"Sometimes one best catches the truth in a half-finished work."

"Not as a maid paints."

"How does a maid paint?"

"Backwards. She paints her picture and then rubs out and out until sometimes she has nothing left."

"And if the likeness is good at the start?"

"Then it stands. But there are many mutilated pictures in a maid's gallery."

"And how does mine progress?"

"So far as you may pierce the gallery windows you may see."

"But your eyes are such loop-holes. One has to be within to see well from them."

"You must win your own position."

"A soldier's privilege is mine?"

"The soldier's privilege is every man's."

"Then, by my soul, I 'll —"

Aunt Philomela was rising from the table. How was that? He had no memory of the intermediate courses.

"You agree, boy?" demanded Dr. Merriweather.

"Oh, certainly," faltered Barnes, "I agree heartily."

CHAPTER XIV

OUTSIDE THE DUTCH DOOR

Before leaving, Dr. Merriweather found an opportunity to draw Barnes one side.

"Boy," he said, "I did n't realize until to-night to how great an extent Mr. Van Patten's condition is due to his mental state. He is already wonderfully improved."

"You mean you think there is now hope for him?"

"I don't want to put it too strongly — but there 's a chance."

"You 've told the others?"

"No. We 'll wait a while before we do that. But I wanted you to know and to thank you."

They were in the dark. The doctor struck a match for his cigar. As the match flickered down, he smiled a little.

"You 'll reap your reward for this somewhere," he concluded.

After the doctor had gone and the three were alone again, Aunt Philomela confronted Barnes.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to confess the truth to Dr. Merriweather?"

"Because I didn't know it myself until I saw him."

"You placed me in a very embarrassing position."

"I thought to rescue you from one," exclaimed Barnes with concern.

"After I had repeated to him that mess of stuff you told me!"

"But my wish was to save you from further committing yourself."

"You had no business getting me into the pickle."

"It was quite by accident."

"That is always a young man's plea. I saw these complications coming from the first. Deceit never succeeds."

"On the contrary, this has succeeded perfectly," Barnes protested. "I'm quite sure the doctor thinks none the worse of us."

"He'll never believe another word I say," complained Aunt Philomela.

"And will trust you in delicate matters as never before," affirmed Barnes.

"To tell him was the only honorable thing to do," broke in Miss Van Patten.

"Then why don't you tell Carl?" Aunt Philomela challenged.

And with this shot Aunt Philomela promptly withdrew before the enemy could fire back, forgetting, however, that she was deserting her most important outpost in so doing. Barnes could scarcely believe his good fortune as he saw her skirts switch upstairs.

"Well," he sighed in relief, "that is over."

"Aunt really quite approves," breathed the girl.

"Of course she does," he agreed.

"But she is probably waiting for me," she added.

"That gives me the strategical position," he declared cheerfully.

"You should be in the army," she commented with heightened color.

"What 's the use when you have given me the soldier's privilege?"

"I?" she exclaimed in astonishment.

"At dinner," he reminded her.

"I don't remember," she murmured, trying hard to recollect the conversation.

"When I spoke of the picture you are painting."

"You must have been talking to yourself," she declared with sudden light.

"So you were, too!" he challenged.

She appeared startled. He realized that this was a good guess.

"You said I looked more like a soldier than an artist," he asserted, making a still wilder guess.

She drew back a little now in genuine consternation.

"Oh, you should n't read one's thoughts," she protested.

She looked very tall and dark and beautiful.

"That is as far as I can go," he admitted reluctantly.

"It is as far as you have any right to go," she said hurriedly.

"You see I talked to you all the while the doctor talked to Aunt Philomela."

"Really?" she asked.

The Princess stalked in and, glad of the relief, she picked up the handsome cat. She herself looked like a princess out of a story-book.

"You answered all my questions very evasively," he complained.

"Perhaps they were not proper questions," she suggested as she stroked the silken back of the other princess.

"They were somewhat direct," he admitted.

"There are some things it is very much wiser

to keep to oneself," she affirmed, looking up sharply at him.

Again he saw a resemblance between her eyes and the night sky over the orchard.

"There are some things in which that matter of so-called wisdom does not enter at all," he returned.

"In that case caution should prompt us."

"Caution is but a lame dog yelping at the heels of Wisdom. Shall I tell you what we discussed?"

She hesitated. There was that about him to-night which bewildered her. He was less a stranger. Perhaps it was the drowsy night; perhaps it was the fact that they stood here for the first time alone, with the dark closing about them. There seemed less to fear in him, more to fear in herself. She answered:

"I think you had better not."

"Well," he submitted reluctantly, "perhaps my conversation *was* in the nature of a confidential communication to myself. Yet it is almost impossible for me to believe you did not actually share it."

It was still more difficult for her to resist the invitation to share it now. The candle sputtering on its last quarter ate its course voraciously as

though in haste to blend this room with the rest of the dark.

"There seems so much we cannot share with others," she ventured.

"I never felt it as I do this moment," he replied. "I think it must be a wonderful experience to lead another through our own peculiar treasure-house of memories. Out of the past we gather so many things — alone; beautiful things, so precious and fine that we hide them deep within ourselves lest the light of merely curious eyes should fade them. Perhaps some of us have partly shared them with the world, in pictures or in verse or in songs, but at best these are but feeble copies. We have n't done much but suggest their form and color or the tune to which they are set. But some day along comes one — to share them. Then we go back to the Thames, the Seine, and over the saffron road to the Schuyler brook and take that other with us through all the long galleries. So we know for the first time why we have stored them all so carefully."

Barnes paused. His eyes had grown distant. Her eyes had come nearer. The cat purred contentedly.

"If I were to make a definition of happiness," he concluded, "it would be this; the privilege of sharing utterly."

She knew. She had her own treasures — her own gallery. But it had never occurred to her that any other should ever see them. These pictures were to be kept tight locked forever. They were to be reviewed even by her only when alone in the dark with the rest of the world tight asleep around her. And now he had made her feel that after all her greatest joy might come in showing them to another. She looked up to find his eyes upon her. They were so brilliant and yet so gentle that they made her fear lest even now they might pierce too deep.

"We may share most things," she hastened to speak, "but always there will be something left for ourselves alone, won't there?"

"Most always," he admitted.

They had remained standing. She leaned back now against the door frame.

"Won't you sit down?" he pleaded.

"No! Oh, no!" she objected quickly.

But he brought a chair and with a smile placed it near the door, as though to assure her of an easy line of retreat. She passed it, and crossing the room sat near the window.

"When making definitions," he continued, seating himself near the other window, "we have for once an opportunity to speak without equivocation.

In reality, things go no further than 'most always.' We seldom attain the absolute. But," he added, lowering his voice a little, "I believe that it 's possible in that one thing which I defined as 'sharing utterly.' I believe that once we may live up to our definition. I believe it is within us all to share once — utterly and without quibbling."

"It does n't *seem* possible," she answered weakly.

"No. But it is."

"I should think it would be quite confusing."

"I should think it would be quite dizzily clarifying."

"Is n't that the same mental condition?" she laughed timidly.

"The difference is the difference in the effect produced by champagne and the effect produced by mountain air," he stated.

"I suppose some such freedom is what we all strive for," she said quickly, with broad generalization.

"There is but little striving in it," he affirmed. "It is the one time when the mountain comes to Mahomet."

"But even then Mahomet must climb the mountain," she suggested.

"He soars to the top, winged," he answered.

The candle began to give warning. The un-

snuffed wick leaned over drunkenly and unfairly ate down its sides. But a candle may not be criticised, however unjust its acts. Barnes saw that it was too late to correct its knavish course though the evening was still young; in two minutes it would unceremoniously snuff out the girl's eyes. It gave fair warning.

Miss Van Patten arose. He had nothing to do but to arise also.

"I shall emulate Mahomet," he declared. "I shall soar to the top of the stairs, winged."

She answered only,

"Good night."

But the simple words set his pulse to beating faster. There was in them something of the 'cello note.

He bowed as she passed before him. She hurried on to Aunt Philomela, and he crossed to the candle and blew it out. He found that after all the dark did not make so much difference.

Barnes made his way to the little Dutch door, opened it and stepped out into the night. As he did so a man who was retreating down the path turned and came back. It was Langdon.

"Hello!" he called. "I had hoped to catch you, but when I saw the light go out, I thought you must have retired."

"You wished to see me?" Barnes asked in surprise.

"You, Joe," answered Langdon nervously. "You don't mind if I call you Joe?"

"Not at all," answered Barnes, indifferently.

But the name instantly destroyed some beautiful dreams he had come out there to dream.

He sat down on the stone step but Langdon remained standing.

"I thought," Langdon began, "that as long as Mr. Van Patten is so ill and you're the man of the family now, I ought to come to you."

"Yes," answered Barnes in surprise.

Langdon faltered on.

"Since I've been down here this summer my music has meant more to me than it ever did before. I've been able to express things through it."

He paused.

"Your sister sort of makes a man understand," he ventured.

Barnes drew a deep breath.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded.

"I'm trying to tell you," answered Langdon, earnestly, "but I want you to understand me first. I know how business men feel about music."

"Business men?"

"They think music and such things are for

women, don't they? They think Art does n't test you like gold hunting."

"I suppose some do."

"Well, it does n't — like gold hunting. It does n't make you muscular. But for two years now I 've stood in front of a mirror and drawn a bow across a fiddle for eight hours, then stopped an hour, and done it again. It is n't easy to do that — all alone. It takes a sort of brawn, does n't it?"

"I should think it might," agreed Barnes.

"It 's been nothing but work up to now," Langdon ran on. "I 've just been learning to play. I could n't see what it was leading to — until this summer."

"And now?" inquired Barnes.

"Now I 've found out. Eleanor has made me see."

Barnes ran his hand over his brow.

"Joe, she 's made me hope for big things; she 's filled my soul full of big songs. Don't you understand now?"

"You mean — you love her?"

Langdon came nearer and held out his hand.

"Yes," he answered.

Barnes took his hand. The purple of the night sky turned to leaden gray.

"Have you told her?" he asked.

"No. I — I thought I ought to tell you first. You know what a wonderful creature she is."

"Yes."

"So — so I thought you ought to know something about the man who wants to ask for her hand."

"That 's very decent of you. But — I have n't anything to say about it."

"She thinks a great deal of you," said Langdon.

Barnes did not answer.

"I don't think she 'd marry anyone you did n't approve of," Langdon laughed nervously. "I never heard a sister admire her brother as she does you."

"Don't!" gasped Barnes.

"Don't?"

"You — you ought n't to repeat those things."

"I 'd almost be glad to be just her brother if she talked that way about me."

There was a long pause. Then Langdon resumed,

"Have I your permission to ask her?"

"*My* permission?"

"If you 'd rather, I 'll wait."

Barnes took a long breath. Then he grasped Langdon's hand again.

"No," he said earnestly, "I don't think I'd wait very long."

"Thank you. And I may tell her I have your consent?"

Barnes smiled grimly.

"If you wish."

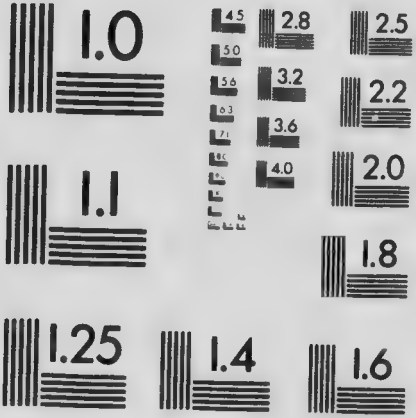
Langdon gripped his hand once more. Barnes turned abruptly.

"You'll excuse me? I'm going in now. Good-night."

Barnes closed the little Dutch door behind him. And instead of soaring, winged, to the top of the stairs, he plodded up as though he were carrying a great weight upon his shoulders.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

CHAPTER XV

PLAYING THE GAME

Barnes had said to Aunt Philomela when she demurred at certain things running counter to her own convictions, "Now that we have begun this game, we must play it for all it 's worth. We must stick it out to the end."

Lying there in his room on the little white bed, Barnes repeated that again to himself. It meant just one thing; that in ll fairness, he must now play the brother in this household as well as the prodigal. He had been admitted within these sacred precincts not as a friend, but as an actor. Honor demanded that he must not presume further than this. That was as clear as a June morning. To take advantage of his position for any personal consideration would be to turn traitor to the old gentleman, to Aunt Philomela, to the girl herself.

Well and good. There was no sense in arguing further along this line. As a gentleman it did not behoove him to discuss it even with himself. Looking then at Langdon's suit impersonally, as a brother, how must he consider it? Dr. Merriweather was a

sufficient voucher for the man's social standing. What of the man himself? He had seen enough of him to realize that he was clean-limbed, clean-hearted. He had also had a glimpse into the man's soul and had found there a brother artist.

Barnes sprang from the bed and taking a chair by the open window inhaled the perfumed night breeze. He was tempted hard to throw this whole matter from his mind, but he gripped himself. Langdon had said, "She has filled my soul with song."

And his own soul this same woman had filled with pictures. He saw down the whole long gallery. There were the pictures by the Thames, by the Seine, by the saffron road, and by the Schuyler brook. They waited but the touch of her fingers upon his arm to spring into reality for all the world to admire. Barnes was breathing rapidly. He checked himself.

There, too, in another heart were the songs. They waited but the brush — of her lips — to be sung. It came hard to acknowledge that. His ancestors, facing English guns, never did a harder thing.

Looking at the matter frankly then, as an artist as well as a brother, there was no ground upon which he could contest Langdon's right to sue for this girl's hand. There remained only his own

man right to fight for his life. But he could not avail himself of this except by deserting this old gentleman — except by coming upon the field frankly as an enemy. His thoughts continually went back to the army code; he was here, as it were, upon parole. To abuse that position would be as cowardly a thing as to fire upon a flag of truce.

It took Barnes four feverish hours to thresh out these manifest truths, but when it was over he found himself in a state of curious self-possession. He had never felt calmer in his life. But somehow this room was not big enough for him; he felt the need of getting out where there was nothing overhead between him and the stars, where to the right and left he should be bounded only by the East and the West. He had not undressed, so he stole out of the room, down the stairs and out by the little Dutch door. It was odd how important a part, first and last, this inanimate object had played in his life. It was this which had first attracted him to the house; it was through this that he had led her when they had gone to the hill top together; hard by this that Langdon had made his confession; and now it furnished him a temporary means of escape from his prison.

Barnes made his way to the top of the hill. The air was cool, the sky was deep, and below him, but

the ghost of itself, lay the saffron road. He studied it with grim interest. It was no longer a glad highway through the King's dominions and it no longer led on, but away. Even the big atlas in the library had proven that in whatever direction he might journey, it must always be away.

There was only one path now which offered him even a destination and that was back to his mother. If it had been possible he would have pushed on in the dark along this ghost road until he reached her. He would like to sit in the park with her and talk over things. He strode a half dozen steps down the hill. Then he came back. When the old gentleman now sleeping so peacefully awoke, he would ask for his son. The thin hands would fumble about for another hand and they must find what they sought.

Barnes threw himself down flat and elbows on the ground rested his chin in his hands. Below him in shadow lay all that vast unexplored country upon which only yesterday he had gazed with her by his side. To-night it was boundless — limitless. Where before it had seemed like a virgin woodland, sun-lighted, it now seemed as somber as a Doré forest. It would be a grim affair — adventuring through this land alone. The pictures a man would bring back with him — Ah, they would be pictures of Hell.

The dawn came softly, tenderly, and like evil before a good woman, the shadows stole away. The dawn came just as Eleanor might come into a room at dusk and light the candles. In the ivory East appeared the red that was in her cheeks; in the black, lowhanging clouds, appeared the gold that was in the black of her hair. A fierce desire for his paints seized him. No one had ever pictured the dawn because no one before had ever divined its secret. The dawn was Eleanor.

He heard footsteps behind and glancing around saw Langdon. The latter paused, started, and then came on again. His face was alight and he looked like one inspired.

"Joe," he said half in awe, "to put that into music, you would have to put Eleanor into music. Then — then — what a symphony you would have!"

Barnes sprang to his feet.

"Good God, man," he cried, "what brought you to this spot?"

"Don't you hear it?" persisted Langdon. "The world all dark and cavernous — like those days in Paris; then her voice calling — far in the distance; then a low morning song, like a morning prayer; then her voice coming nearer until, in a wild medley of song, her presence breaks upon the world and the world awakes — as a soul awakes."

Standing very erect, his head back, Langdon faced the East.

And Barnes facing Langdon saw his picture fade — fade — until some demon in him made him feel for a moment that it would be right for him to battle with this man in defense of his own. How simple it would be if here on this hill-top in the early morning the two might grapple until one was left supreme. Langdon turned and caught a flash in the eyes of this other which drove the music from his soul.

"What 's the matter?" he exclaimed. "You look feverish."

Barnes did not answer for a moment. He very deliberately sat down. He felt ashamed of this primeval instinct. If in the days to follow he could n't show any better control over himself than this, he had better find it out now.

"Sit down, Langdon," he said. "What got you up so early?"

"The dawn," answered Langdon.

As he seated himself, he took one swift look at Barnes' face, but he soon forgot whatever it was he had observed a second ago. He had more vital things in mind than the passing mood of a prodigal.

"I could n't sleep," he explained. "Somehow

the fact of having spoken to you made all the things I 've been merely dreaming all this while seem intensely real."

"I would n't let them be too real until — I had spoken to her."

"I know," Langdon answered quickly, "I don't wish to presume. But a man is n't responsible for his unbidden thoughts, is he?"

"Who is?" asked Barnes.

"No one. No one — on earth."

"But every man has to stand for himself — the consequences of his thinking."

"I 'm willing to do that. But — well, I don't suppose you realize how big a part a woman plays in work of my sort."

"I think I do."

"She 's the very life of it."

"The very life," repeated Barnes.

"In business, it 's every man for himself; but in music you 've got to have someone to sing to, someone to play for."

"What about the masters?"

"Oh, when a man 's a genius, it 's different. But when you 're just human — well, that 's all I am and I 'm glad of it. I don't care for lonely grandeur, Joe. I only want to climb as high as I can go with Eleanor."

"Good Lord," exploded Barnes, "can a man go any higher than that?"

"I can't at any rate," answered Langdon, simply.

Barnes studied him a moment. Then he said more quietly, "And you 're sure you can go as far as that? You 're sure you can go as high as she can take you, Langdon?"

"A man can't tell, Joe," answered Langdon, sincerely, "but at times — like this morning — I feel as though there were no heights I could n't reach. She seems to put the whole world into song. I find myself trying to set to music everything she looks at. It 's wonderful. It 's — it 's almost terrifying. Why, when you were telling her about Alaska — I watched her eyes and almost caught a symphony there."

Barnes moved uneasily.

"What is it?" demanded Langdon. "It seems as though you ought to understand."

"Why should I understand?"

"Your eyes," answered Langdon.

He leaned closer and for a second stared into them. Then he rose and stood in front of Barnes.

"Why there 's a symphony in them," he exclaimed. "A great, big tragic theme — of some sort!"

Barnes smiled grimly.

"If I were an artist," he said, "I'd paint you as you stand there saying that, Langdon. There's a big triumphant picture in you — of some sort!"

Barnes made his feet and for a moment the men stood side by side looking down upon the green valley which was slowly coming to life there below them. What a song it was; what a picture it was! The blazing sun was big enough to make both of it. For a second Barnes caught a flash of some hidden meaning in this thought. Then his face hardened; even the sun could not do both through one man alone.

Barnes turned abruptly.

"I'll see you after breakfast, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Langdon, "I'll come over early."

Barnes hesitated. This hill-top now seemed like a strategic point. To go meant leaving Langdon in possession. But this was only a concrete example of the whole problem which he had worked out earlier in the night. If he had entered this household upon the same plane upon which Langdon had entered it, then he would have a right to remain on the hill-top and fight for his pictures and all those meant. But he had n't. That was the point. When he left Aunt Philomela that first night and went upstairs, he had given a silent pledge of honor. To some men this might seem a nice point, open at

least to argument. But Barnes all his life had lived by nice points. That was his glory as an artist. Without another word, he trudged back down the hill.

The house was still asleep. It looked like a very young girl asleep. It took the morning light drowsily and peacefully. Beneath the windows, the flowers fresh from their dew bath met the eye of the sky proudly and unashamed. It was impossible for Barnes, in the face of these things, to brood. He could n't as yet endure the confines of his room, but he strode off down the damp road with good spirit. Then he turned off to the right and crossed the fields to the brook. Here in a clump of alders he undressed and threw himself into the stinging cold waters. As he bobbed up pink with every vein responding, he shook the water from his eyes and struck across to the other bank. So for ten minutes he swam in and out over the clean sands and water-cress like the king trout himself. And when he came out it was with his brain clear and his heart beating sturdily.

Barnes found Mr. Van Patten awake and waiting for him when he came back to the house. The old gentleman measured time by the twittering of the birds in the morning, and their sleepy chirp at night. His voice was stronger and the grip of his

hand on Barnes' arm firmer. But more than this Barnes noticed that which at first frightened him — an awakening in the aged face, a new expression about the eyes in place of the blank, fixed stare.

"Are the curtains raised?" demanded Van Patten.

"Yes," answered Barnes, "as high as usual."

"Put them way up," insisted Mr. Van Patten. "I want all the light there is."

Barnes snapped them to the top. The room became flooded with the morning sunshine. When he turned, the old gentleman was upon his elbow straining towards them.

"What is it?" Barnes asked in some alarm.

Mr. Van Patten fell back again with almost a smile about his lips.

"Nothing," he answered. "Sit over here by my side."

Barnes took his usual position between the windows and the bed. Mr. Van Patten turned to face him.

"Joe," he began, "I lost five years of you out of my life and I've been wondering just how far I'm to blame for it."

"But that's all over with now," suggested Barnes.

"As far as I'm concerned. But there's you —

I don't want you to suffer what I suffered. I want you to learn."

"As a son, I 've learned," answered Barnes.

"But not as a father, Joe. I suppose some day you 'll marry."

"Marry?"

"And have a son of your own."

"It — it does n't sound probable just at present," answered Barnes.

"Well, you will, my boy. And the best I can pray for you is that you 'll find another woman like your mother."

There was just one woman like that mother to whom the old gentleman referred. Barnes caught his breath at thought of it.

"I suppose there is another," murmured Mr. Van Patten. "For someone, Eleanor is going to be just such another."

"Yes," said Barnes. "I think she 's that one other."

Mr. Van Patten moved uneasily.

"It 's easier to think of your marrying than of Eleanor marrying," he said. "But I suppose she will. Have you seen much of Carl?"

Barnes jumped at the question.

"Why, yes," he answered, "I 've — I 've seen a good deal of him lately."

"I 'm glad of that, Joe. Eleanor has been thrown in with him nearly every day this summer. What sort of a man does he appear — to a man?"

"But you 've talked with him yourself, have n't you?"

"Not much. I have n't felt like seeing anyone. Aunt Philomela likes him. Do you?"

It was a direct question. Barnes answered it directly.

"Yes."

"He is clean and sincere?"

"Yes."

"Eleanor says he has a very great gift in music."

"I 'm no judge of that, but I believe he 's honest as an artist."

"Well. Well. The girl must choose for herself. I 've thought the intimacy was growing."

"I think it is."

"He would make her happy?"

"If she loves him, I have no doubt of it."

"But she must be sure of her love. I trust you, Joe, to make that point clear to her."

"I think you may trust *her* for that."

"She will act up to her conviction but she is young — younger than her years. And I — without my eyes — I can't be much of a father." He reached for Barnes' hand.

"You must be son and father and brother all in one, Joe."

"I 'll do my best," answered Barnes.

"I know you will, boy. I know you will. You 've grown wonderfully in these last five years. But I think you would have grown just the same if you had not gone away. The fault was mine. I did n't stay young enough for you."

"You seem very young to me now."

"Ah, yes. I 've grown young. That is the secret I 've worked out in the dark; as the son grows old, the father must grow young."

The Princess stalked into the room and jumped upon the bed. The father reached out to stroke her back and faced the door for Eleanor. She entered with the blush of the morning in her cheeks. She nodded with a smile at Barnes and then with a little laugh pressed her lips against her father's forehead.

"Dad," she exclaimed, "you look so much better. You look so much better every morning."

"I 'll soon be out of bed now," he answered with conviction.

Then he did the same thing which had startled Barnes upon his entrance — he rose to his elbow and strained his eyes towards the girl as though he had suddenly become endowed with his sight again.

Miss Van Patten glanced up swiftly at Barnes, as though for an explanation. The latter could only stare back.

"What 's the trouble, Daddy?" she stammered.

His face was not troubled but he did not look as he looked yesterday.

"Nothing, child, nothing. Dr. Merriweather is coming to-day?"

"Shall I send for him?"

"No, but if Carl comes over — Carl is coming to-day?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"He told me that he was coming this morning," put in Barnes.

"Then when he comes, tell him to ask the doctor to drop over this evening."

"Very well, Daddy."

Mr. Van Patten smiled.

"Joe says he finds Carl a fine fellow."

The girl glanced up swiftly at Barnes. He met her eyes fairly. Then he nodded.

"Yes," he answered, "I think he is."

"But Daddy," she exclaimed, and her cheeks grew a deeper crimson as she spoke, "you have seen him. You know."

"The young are better judges of the young, than the old are," he answered.

And reaching for her hand, he patted it tenderly.

"Carl has often said he wished to see more of you, Daddy. Perhaps now that you 're stronger —"

"Joe must see for me," answered Mr. Van Patten. "I leave Carl to him for the present."

Barnes arose.

"Father," he said, "I will come up again — after Carl arrives."

Whereupon he retired. To all intents and purposes it was a retreat.

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN GIVES HIS NOTICE

Aunt Philomela was waiting breakfast in no very good humor. On the previous evening, she had sat up for an hour listening to the unintelligible hum of her niece's voice without being able to catch a word of what she said. And when Miss Van Patten had finally stolen into the room, Aunt Philomela had found little relief in her questioning. The remainder of the night she had made a martyr of herself. She dreamed that Eleanor had run away with a ne'er do well artist, deserting her poor old aunt and her sick father. Then, in her dream, Mr. Van Patten had died, thereby leaving her a lonely, heart-broken old woman finding what solace she might in consecrating her life to the poor of the villa ... And that, after all, was a poor sort of consola...

So when Aunt Philomela came down she was in no mood to be trifled with. Yet it was just this inopportune moment that John chose to explode a bomb-shell at her feet.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he stammered, "but I wishes to give my notice."

"You — what?" she cried.

"I wishes to give my notice," he repeated with more self-assertiveness than she had ever suspected was in the man.

Aunt Philomela plumped herself down in a chair and folded her hands in her lap.

"Well," she gasped, "I never heard of such a thing in all my life."

John automatically adjusted his tie and ran his hand over his chin. He had been particularly careful in his toilet this morning.

"And what pray may be your reason?" she demanded.

"It 's nothin' as you might say," he answered uneasily, "that you can put your hands on, ma'am."

"Don't you get enough to eat?"

"Lord, yes, ma'am."

"Are n't you well enough paid?"

"I would n't take no more, ma'am."

"Have you secured another position?"

"No, ma'am," he hastened to assure her as though freeing himself from the charge of treason.

"You have a nice, clean place to sleep?"

"A man could ask for nothing better, ma'am."

If anything it was too clean and nice.

"Then what in the world is the matter with you?" she exclaimed, the mystery deepening.

John cleared his throat. This was a difficult matter to express. There have been plenty of better men in a like position — men with well-defined notions of what they wished to say but when the time came with no words to say them.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "if I says I has n't slept for three nights that will be enough."

"Then all you need is a tonic," she affirmed, brightening. "I 'll get the bottle —"

She had half risen when he checked her. He remembered with decided unpleasantness the taste of that dark liquid which she kept for the occasional indispositions of her staff.

"No 'm. It is n't anything that medicine can fairly reach, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am."

"Then if it is n't your blood, it 's your nerves," she declared.

"Nerves comes nearer it," he admitted.

"Perhaps you need a vacation," she hazarded, thoug'. the prospect of being left without John was unthinkable.

"I had thought of going off somewhere," he confessed.

There was something in the way he said it — something in the way he glanced swiftly upward

towards Mr. Barnes' room that gave her a clew. She sat bolt upright.

"You don't mean to tell me you 've got your fool head turned about Alaska, do you?"

John nodded weakly.

"It *was* the Artcic that set me goin'."

She sprang to her feet.

"Why, you — you 'd freeze to death there," she exclaimed.

"Lord, ma'am, I was n't thinking of going there," he hastened to assure her.

"Then what — " she stammered, all at sea again.

"I wants to get away from the Artcic," he explained. "I wants to get as far away as I can."

"Well, you can't get any farther away than this without running into the ocean."

John tiptoed nearer. He spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"He brought it with him," he explained.

He turned his eyes towards the stairs again.

"What did he bring?"

"It," answered John. "The Thing under the bed."

"He did? Why, he was never within a thousand miles of — "

She checked herself just in time. John's eyes had begun to open wide. She was in a position

more embarrassing than any which had yet grown out of this course of deceit. If there were any one thing more vital than cleanliness which she had impressed upon her servants, it was truthfulness. She had held it before their eyes as a clear translucent crystal. And now was she to be forced to violate it herself? Was she to be thrust into the position of being untruthful to her own butler? Her weak limbs shook beneath her at her helplessness. Her cheeks turned scarlet.

"You don't know, ma'am," commented John.

She did n't know! She would have given a year of her life if she did n't know. If only she herself were so deluded that she might innocently repeat those outrageous yarns, she could at least preserve her self respect. But no, she must sit dumb, expressing a silent lie.

"There 's Things," whispered John, "that you does n't even suspect."

At this she roused herself. She scented a new danger. Perhaps John was eavesdropping last night.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, with some show of her old spirit.

"In the closet. Under the bed," he answered.

"Are you crazy?"

The surprise occasioned by this unexpected state-

ment bewildered her still more. Surprise had followed surprise, until now she could make neither head nor tail out of John's fears.

"He says as how it has to do with gold," continued John.

"So it was he who told you about this?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"No, ma'am. That 's the trouble. I don't mind anything I can lay my hands on."

He drew himself to his full height.

"Then," choked Aunt Philomela, in helpless wrath, "why don't you face it like a man?"

"If it did n't come from the Arctic, ma'am."

"Well, it did n't," she declared.

"Then you knows about it?"

"Yes," she answered coldly, "I know all about it."

"Perhaps you 've seen it?"

"I don't need to see it, to know all about it."

John looked skeptical.

"People always thinks things is n't so until he sees them himself," he observed sadly.

"That is a frightfully ungrammatical sentence," she commented.

"It does n't take grammar to see them," he ventured with some truth.

"Bah!" she snorted.

Then of a sudden she came to herself.

"I can tell you what you're going to do," she stormed, stepping towards him. "You're going back to your work and think no more about these fool things. You leave them to me. I'll attend to them. You understand? Go back to your work and do no more talking about leaving or I'll discharge you quicker than you can say Jack Robinson. You need n't worry about any more Things or Its. I'll attend to those, too."

John had been slowly pressed back. His spirit had quite gone at the first sentence. He was not a timid man, but it took more than human courage to stand before Aunt Philomela in such a mood. He would thank his stars if he could only get safely into the buttery again. She paused a moment, and John threw himself against the swinging door and disappeared. Aunt Philomela turned around.

It was this auspicious moment that Barnes chose for entering. Aunt Philomela swung upon him before he had time even to say good-morning.

"Do you think it's honorable to scare a poor old butler half to death?" she demanded.

He glanced around as though he expected to see the corpse of the poor butler lying upon the floor.

"Why, no," he agreed.

"Then why did you do it?"

"I?" he stammered. "Why, it's the poor old butler who has been trying to frighten me."

"I'd be thankful if he had succeeded," she snapped.

"He is a mystic — that man," declared Barnes. "He is a seer of things in the dark."

"And who put the foolish notions into his head?" she insisted unflinchingly.

"Who? I should like to know as well as you. Who taught him to walk on tiptoe? Who taught him to appear as though through a trap-door? Who taught him to look suddenly about [illegible]ough in league with the unknown? Who —" he demanded darkly, "taught him to look under beds?"

Aunt Philomela caught her breath at this last query.

"At least," she returned weakly, "I never made him believe he saw anything under there."

"Nor I," he hastened to explain. "That is what bothered us both; we could n't find anything."

"Perhaps," she observed sarcastically. "Perhaps you wish to enter a complaint against John."

At this moment John himself entered with the coffee.

"John," announced Barnes, "I beg to report

that the Thing is gone. Pouf!" he snapped his fingers. "All gone."

"Y. · really thinks so?" stammered John.

"I 'll give you a dollar for every time you find him after this," agreed Barnes.

"Lord, sir, I would n't find him for a hundred."

"Then we 'll let him go. As a matter of fact it got too hot for him around here. He 's used to a colder climate."

"That 's good, sir. I hope you sleeps better at night for it."

"Hoping you will the same, I beg to remain," he concluded, quoting from the personal circular letter of the Acme.

John went out with a brisker step than he had shown for a number of days, and in at the other door, with an even brisker step, came Eleanor.

It would be difficult to imagine a fairer harbinger of peace than she, and yet it required all her best efforts to dissipate the cloud which hung over the breakfast table that morning. Barnes, who was always ready to assist at such an undertaking, was strangely silent, while Aunt Philomela refused to enthuse even over the marked change for the better in her brother's condition. Everyone was glad when the meal was finished. When they rose, Carl had not yet appeared. Barnes braced himself to

the task ahead. As Miss Van Patten stood uncertain just what to do next, he suggested that she come with him into the flower-garden for a breath of the morning air. She appeared a bit startled but acquiesced, and so they made their way out doors.

Just how far it was his right to go, just how far it was his duty as a brother to go, Barnes did not know, but that he must say something in view of what was coming he had no doubt. She was bending over her flowers plucking off dead leaves when he began.

"Eleanor," he said, "your father seemed to be very much interested in Carl this morning."

"Indeed?"

"Very much interested," he repeated.

She gave him no encouragement. He looked about anxiously.

"He and I both agreed that Carl is a fine fellow," he observed. She raised her head at this. She looked at him without embarrassment.

"Carl is an artist," she said. "You and Carl ought to have much in common."

"Much in common?" he exclaimed. "We have. We have too much in common."

"What do you mean by that?"

Her question was as direct and unsuspicious as a child's.

"We agree on so very many things that — well, you know it's sometimes more comfortable to disagree."

"Is it?"

"With Aunt Philomela, for instance. We get on much better by disagreeing than we should if we looked at things in just the same way."

"But at bottom, you know, you and Aunt Philomela really agree. She wouldn't quarrel with you if she didn't agree with you."

"No?" he asked with interest. "What would she do?"

"She would be very polite with you," she answered.

"That would be terrible."

"At least, it would be uninteresting. She is polite to the Reverend John Powers."

"I haven't met him yet."

"Not yet. But you can never tell when you may meet him."

She bent over her flowers again. Barnes tried to collect his thoughts. He hadn't got very far with that beginning.

"The thing that impressed both your father and me about Carl —" he began.

She lifted her head once more.

"Yes?" she inquired sweetly.

If he could only paint her as she stood now — as though she were growing in the garden! So few women really get up until after lunch, but she — she, like the poppies, awoke with the kiss of the sun into her full beauty. There was no trace of the night about her. All her dreams were tucked away in the long gallery with her pictures. Yesterday was one with ten thousand yesterdays and she was as though new born for this day alone. This was especially true of her eyes. As the planets bear no trace of the eternal cycles through which they have ranged, but come each night new created, so her eyes were almost abstract in their freshness.

"I suppose," she said, to break the silence, "I suppose I ought to take Aladdin out to-day. He's been shut up in his stall for a week now."

Yesterday he would have protested. Now he basely betrayed his trust.

"If you are going to ride, you ought to ride this morning, ought n't you?"

"Yes," she answered. "I think I ought to go at once."

He felt a bit uncomfortable, but if Carl did n't know enough to take quick advantage of his opportunity that was his own fault. Surely his duty as a brother did not go so far as to manage Carl's wooing. She started towards the stable.

"I will go just as I am," she determined.

"And I will help you saddle the horse," he said.

Aladdin heard her coming before her feet had touched the barn floor and greeted her with a glad whinny. He cropped at her fingers as she untied the halter rope. Sam, the man of all work, came up, but she would have none of his help. She led out the strong-limbed animal and in a jiffy adjusted his bridle. The most that Barnes found to do was to throw the saddle over his back, and even then she insisted upon fastening the girths herself. Barnes kept his eye down the road and became as impatient as Aladdin himself for the start.

Sam held out his hand and her foot scarcely touched it as she vaulted lightly into the saddle. And then how like a queen she looked! Her long skirt made her seem even more like one of those for whom King Arthur's knights fought.

She spoke a word to Aladdin, waved her hand, and in all too brief a space was out of sight.

Barnes went back to the house. Near the Dutch door he met Carl.

"Eleanor," explained Barnes, "has just galloped off."

He took an immense amount of satisfaction in

conveying this slight bit of news. But the next second his enthusiasm vanished.

"Is that so?" answered Langdon. "Why, then, I guess I'll go down the road and meet her as she comes back."

CHAPTER XVII

THE ROAD COMPLICATES MATTERS

With the breeze singing past her ears, Eleanor continued down the very road along which she had walked with Mr. Barnes when she had gone with him to the station for his bag. She smiled. She was quite sure that had she been with Carl she would not have forgotten her mission. But of course that was quite easy of explanation; Carl was, comparatively speaking, an old friend now. With old friends one did n't forget one's errands.

As she galloped along she seemed to hear Barnes talking to her again. She recalled all that he had told her of his life, of his college days, of his journey abroad, of his family at home, and the motive which had prompted him to undertake his vagabond trip through these hills. She had taken it as a pretty compliment that he told her these things — especially after his confession that he had not intended to do so. She smiled again. She could smile safely here alone on Aladdin's back. And there is nothing so worth smiling at as the

woman power which makes a man do something against his will.

She passed the apple-trees, the pines, and was well into the maple-grove before she slackened her pace. Aladdin was in fine fettle and resented the pull of the bit which slowed him down into a walk. He tossed his head and jerked up his forelegs as though doing a quadrille. But now her thoughts had come back to this morning and to the curious emphasis which both men were placing upon Carl. Somehow Carl did not seem a man who should be emphasized. He came as a pleasant part of a summer day, and though at times when they had been playing together he had been able to sweep her on into a more rarefied atmosphere, he always brought her back again when he put down his bow. The thing she had liked about him was that he had always been so unobtrusive and yet by this very method he had made for himself a place in her life. If Carl should go she would miss him. She would be almost homesick for him. He was ever gentle, ever thoughtful, ever ready in his quiet way to fill an hour that without him would be tedious. Then at intervals came, too, those rare moments when he suggested to her a new life — when he led her to the hill-top. In a word, Carl had taken her as he found her, had

blended himself with her, until now he was as important to her in a way as Aunt Philomela, the old brick house, or Aladdin and the Princess.

She had never quarreled with Carl. She could not imagine such a thing. It would be as senseless as quarreling with herself. He understood her perfectly and she understood him perfectly and each had too much respect for the other ever to force an issue. Before a clash came either he would surrender a point or she would surrender a point, and so they would go on together harmoniously. She could always affect a compromise with Carl. With a little glow of satisfaction she realized that she could trust herself to him with this sure knowledge. If love meant peace, then she and Carl were lovers.

With a little gasp of surprise she realized this was just what her father had hinted at; with a burning of the cheeks and a tightening of her throat she realized that this was what Barnes had tried to tell her. With her father she accepted his concern with nothing more than maidenly confusion at having it for the first time put so starkly; but with Barnes she felt a touch of resentment.

From the first moment she had met Barnes he had a way, in spite of all his well meaning, of making her uncomfortable. He had forced her

into a position which, however she might defend it to Aunt Philomela, which, however much it justified itself, certainly had not been conducive to peace in her own mind. Had she met Carl for the first time by the letter-box that day, he would never have suggested such a disturbing adventure as this upon which Barnes had embarked her. Carl would have realized her position perfectly, would have sympathized with her fully, and would have helped her to do that which out of her own conscience she would have known must be done. In the end he might have taken his violin and brought her solace for the inevitable consequences.

Again, in all the days she had known Carl he had never urged her to run counter to any wish of Aunt Philomela's. He would never have persuaded her to walk to the station with him after his bag, and certainly would never have forgotten the bag after starting. He would never have made her go fishing; he would never have put her into an embarrassing position before the cook or in the library; he would never have made her so uncomfortable as she was this minute sitting upon Aladdin.

She touched her horse's neck and he broke again into a gallop. Within sight of the station, she turned and rode back again for fully two miles

without stopping. When she did stop it was at sight of Carl swinging down a level stretch of road a full mile distant. Then, upon the spur of the moment, she turned once more and galloped back towards the station. But once well hidden by a turn in the road, she drew up the horse and continued at a walk.

This unusual act was not so much inspired by Carl as by Barnes. Her cheeks grew scarlet but she faced the fact squarely. She wished to think a bit more about this man who had strode so soldier-like into her life — even though it made her uncomfortable.

Carl had spoken of some great tragedy which he had seen in Barnes' eyes. She herself had not seen it until this morning, when for a second as he had stood with her by her father's bedside she seemed to feel it; and again later, when at breakfast, he had flashed a look at her which suggested a pain which with difficulty he held in control. Yet, when she had repeated Carl's words to him, he had denied the tragedy, and he was a man to tell the truth. Perhaps he himself did not yet recognize it. Perhaps it was as yet something which he refused to admit even to himself. The th ught roused in her a queer little motherly concern. He was doing so much for her that it seemed as

though there must be something she could do in return.

She laughed at herself. He was not a man to need any such slight help as she might be able to give him. A man who talked so sturdily of adventuring — a man who faced the purple rim of the sky with no other emotion than eagerness to be over it — did not need her, who only drew back from it in awe.

She had looked at a hundred sunsets with Carl. He had helped her to see the beauties in them, had made her feel the song in them, had brought home to her a sense of peace in them. But he had never left her wondering; he had never sent her back through the little Dutch door half in fear.

She caught herself with a start. She had drifted unconsciously into a comparison of these two men. To say the least, this was presumptuous of her. She turned Aladdin once more and gave him the bit. He sprang as though at a hurdle and cut his feet into the hard road. She sat upon his back with her thoughts so far away that she was scarcely conscious of riding. So she took the first turn in the road more carelessly than usual. She had just time to swerve one side from an automobile which rounded the corner. She lost her balance, regained it, and, still unsteady in her seat, knew that

for the first time in his life Aladdin had lost his head.

She was not frightened, but the unexpectedness of the emergency took all the strength from her. When she pulled at the bit she found her arms as weak as a child's. She tried to speak, but found her tongue dumb. As she swayed in the saddle she saw Carl. He was watching her approach unable to make out whether it was a wild ride or a runaway. Then she fell sideways, and her foot caught in the stirrup. She had a vague memory of Carl's white face as he stood in the middle of the road; remembered seeing him spring, and then the dark closed in upon her.

When again she came to herself, she was lying by the road side and Carl was bending over her. Her face was wet and he was moistening her lips with a damp handkerchief. She could n't understand why he should be doing this. He was covered with dust, his coat was torn, and his hand was trembling.

"Carl," she said, "what — what — in the world — have you been doing?"

"Eleanor," he trembled.

She tried to raise herself to her elbow but the effort hurt her. As she fell back again she remembered distinctly the vision of Carl standing in the middle of the road and springing for the bit.

Then she recalled the whole incident. She looked anxiously at the dusty figure still bending over her.

"You are hurt?" she asked quietly.

"My arm," he answered.

She noticed that his left arm hung limply by his side. She tried again to sit up but her bruised back forced her down again. She closed her eyes. Through the dizzy turmoil in her brain one fact thrust itself forward with acute clearness; Carl had saved her life. But for him, Aladdin might have dragged her half a mile. The truth came as something of a surprise. When she had seen him standing there, it had not occurred to her that he would do this. She had only feared lest he should be trampled down. Instead, he had stood his ground. She was proud of him. It would be a pleasure to tell Barnes of this.

"If you 're more comfortable," he said, "I'll go back to the house and —"

"Where is Aladdin?"

"After I got you clear, he ran on."

"He 'll return to the house," she said, "I guess that's all the word they 'll need."

Carl rose to his feet.

"I'd better make sure."

He was unsteady. She was quick to perceive it.

"Sit down here by me, Carl," she said, "they — they will come for us." He obeyed her. She noticed that his left arm hung like an empty sleeve.

"You were very brave, Carl," she said.

The color returned to his cheeks. He looked down at her with an expression that was quite boyish in its frank delight.

"Any man would be brave for you," he said simply.

She wondered at this. It gave her a new sense of power and yet she did not smile as she had when she learned that Barnes had told her things he had not intended to tell her. Nor did the power seem so great, though both incidents opened her eyes to a new personality within her. And both gave her sense of responsibility which, while nursing the pride which all responsibility gives, brought its burden too. In mounting the throne which was her birthright, she was forced to assume the duties of a ruler. A queen must take a sterner oath of allegiance than the humblest of her subjects.

From the direction of the house, she heard the clattering hoof beats of a racing horse.

"He is coming," she said.

"Dr. Merriweather?"

"No," she answered, "I don't think it's Dr. Merriweather."

Carl stepped into the road. In a cloud of dust a horse and buggy was approaching at a mad gallop.

"It's Joe!" he exclaimed.

Eleanor smoothed back the hair from her brow and forced herself to sit up. If a moment before her face had lacked color it did not now. With Carl she watched the nearing carriage with an interest that almost made her forget her pain.

Barnes drew up the horse with a suddenness that brought it to its hind legs. Before it had fairly stopped he had leaped out, run across the road, and knelt by her side.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, as he met her smile. "You're not badly hurt?"

"No, but Carl —"

He turned as though for the first time conscious that the other was here.

"He has hurt his arm," she said. "I guess he saved my life."

"But *you* are all whole? You aren't cut or broken —"

"Only just bruised," she answered, "but Carl — I'm afraid he's broken his arm."

Carl had come nearer. Barnes rose and grasped his sound hand.

"You 've earned the thanks of us all, old man," he said.

Carl flushed.

"It was nothing. We — we 've got to get her back to the house."

"I 've sent for the doctor," said Barnes. "When I saw Aladdin come back riderless I knew there was trouble."

He returned to the girl.

"Think you can make your feet?"

"I — I 'll try."

He placed his arm about her waist and she stood up. But she could not rest her weight upon her left ankle.

"Put your arm around my neck," he commanded.

She obeyed.

He placed one arm below her and lifting her clear of the ground bore her to the carriage. Then with her right foot upon the step she easily clambered in.

"Now you, Carl."

The latter took his place by Eleanor's side. Barnes swung the horse about, touched him with the whip and they galloped back He sat between

the two and did not speak again until they reached the house. Then once more he took her in his arms and carried her into the house. He carried her upstairs, though she protested at this, and lowered her upon her little white bed.

Aunt Philomela neither shrieked nor fainted. In a business-like way she ordered Barnes from the room and proceeded to disrobe the girl.

By the time Barnes was downstairs again Dr. Merriweather had arrived. He admitted later that it was the only time in his life that his horse had not gone fast enough for him. He went up the stairs two at a time.

Barnes found Carl, grown a bit faint, in the living-room. He got cold water for him and then very gently removed his coat and slit his sleeve to the shoulder.

"We 'll be ready for the doctor when he comes down," he said. "Sure you 're sound everywhere else?"

"Yes. But Eleanor — I 'm afraid she 's hurt worse than she seemed."

"She 's in the best of hands now. And Carl — it was bully of you."

"Why — there was n't anything else to do!"

"No. But we don't all do the only thing."

"I guess anyone would — with her."

"With her?" exclaimed Barnes. "Well, I don't know but what you 're right. Perhaps we all would — with her."

He led him to a sofa and made him lie down.

From above came the imperious tinkle of the silver bell.

"There he goes!" exclaimed Barnes. "I wondered how long it would take him to smell out this."

He hurried upstairs where he found the old gentleman upon his elbow, his eyes turned towards Eleanor's room.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT MAKES A PRODIGAL

Dr. Merriweather reported that Miss Van Patten had escaped with nothing worse than bruises and a wrenched ankle.

"But by the Lord, Harry!" he exploded, "it was nothing short of a miracle."

"A miracle?" questioned Barnes. "What about Carl's part in it?"

The doctor paused a moment. Then he smiled.

"Carl was the miracle," he answered.

Langdon himself did not get off so easily; his arm was broken below the elbow and the danger did not so much lie in the break as in the stiffness which might result. The doctor did not realize as fully as Barnes what the sheer nimbleness of those fingers of the left hand meant to Carl. Like a good many country physicians, he was greater as a medical man than as a surgeon. He rather took this aftermath of a fracture for granted. Consequently he was a bit surprised at Barnes' concern in the matter.

"We'll have his arm out of a sling in six

weeks," declared the doctor. "May be a bit stiff, but — "

"Good heavens!" exploded Barnes. "You 'd better amputate it and be done with it."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I mean that if you take his fiddle away from him, you take away his soul."

"His soul?"

"Exactly. He could n't sing without his fiddle any more than I could paint without my hands. What 's a soul without a song? And he — he has some big ones to sing during these next few years."

"Steady. Steady. Don't let that imagination of yours run away with you."

Barnes studied the big-framed, big-faced man a second and continued more soberly.

"What you call imagination are the grim facts of life for him and for me, doctor. His fiddle is n't a detail of his life — it 's life itself for him. Cripple his arm and you cripple his soul. You 've got to fight as hard for those fingers as you would for his life."

If Dr. Merriweather was at first only annoyed by what he took to be mere extravagance of speech, there was something now in the tense face of Barnes which made him pause and think.

"Carl did n't say anything to me about that," he observed.

"No," answered Barnes, "because he did n't wish it to get upstairs."

"To Eleanor?"

"To Eleanor," answered Barnes.

Dr. Merriweather held out his hand.

"Boy," he said quietly, "now I understand the miracle. You 're a better physician in this household than I."

"No. But when you live here day after day there are certain things you 're forced to see."

"I wonder if you 've diagnosed anything peculiar about Mr. Van Patten lately."

Barnes moved uneasily.

"He seems better, that 's all."

"Anything queer about his eyes?"

"I 've noticed that every time anyone comes into the room he strains towards him as though trying to see."

"Just so. Has it occurred to you that perhaps he *does* see?"

"That he can — actually *can* see?"

The doctor nodded.

"Why no!" exclaimed Barnes. "Why — that does n't seem possible!"

"If he continues to pull himself together at this

rate, it 's coming. All I 'm wondering about is if he is n't even now playing possum."

"Why should he do that?"

"I 'm not saying that he is, mind you. But it would n't surprise me if some day he surprised the rest of you."

"But look here — this is serious. If once he sees me — "

"Even then he might not recognize you. He is n't as alert mentally as he used to be; his new joy in life would force back every doubt ; your acceptance here by Aunt Philomela and Eleanor — "

"But Good Heavens that would mean a terrible crash in prospect. I can't stay on here forever."

"It 's too much for me, my boy," the doctor answered soberly.

"But if he can see now, why does n't he say so?"

"These old men get strange whims. Perhaps he 's waiting to make sure of his sight so as not to disappoint the others by raising their hope. Or it may be just an old man's joke."

Barnes smiled. It was something of an ironical smile.

"If one had the right point of view," he remarked, "there are several things a man might think a good joke here."

"And you," answered the doctor with a good-natured grin, "are that man, I should say."

"Perhaps."

"Thank God it's your type of man who's playing this game," concluded the doctor.

It was three days before Barnes was allowed to see Miss Van Patten. On the whole they were three of the most uncomfortable days he ever passed. The father demanded more and more of his time and succeeded, whether deliberately or not, in a pretty form of torture. He pressed him harder in his questioning both about Alaska and about Carl and never withdrew from his face those closed eyes which still seemed at times to flicker as though opened the tiniest crack. But that may have been pure imagination. There are holy images which if one gazes long enough upon them appear to move their eyes.

Between his visits to the father Barnes made at least one daily pilgrimage to Dr. Merriweather's for a short talk with Carl. Here again he submitted to another kind of torture. Barnes understood Langdon as no one else on earth understood him, and this invited from the latter the frankest kind of confidence. He listened and he suffered.

Back in the house again, he must needs repeat to Aunt Philomela the greater part of his talk with Langdon.

"The dear boy!" she once exclaimed, "Eleanor is under very great obligations to him."

"Very great," answered Barnes. "He saved her life."

"I hope he 'll soon be able to come over."

"So do I," Barnes answered honestly.

"He and Eleanor have always got on so well together. In all the time they have known one another they have never quarreled."

"That is very well behaved of them."

"So you see — " she concluded significantly.

"Yes," he assured her hastily, "I see.

During those three days, then, Barnes played his part like a good actor — fulfilled his duty like a good soldier, but he lived in dreary isolation. Aunt Philomela saw no change in him. If she had, it would have been some satisfaction to her. As it was they dined in solemn tête-à-tête and disagreed upon every topic proposed for conversation — except Carl. If anything, Barnes' meek acquiescence on this subject irritated her more than an aggressive attitude on his part would have done. It was altogether too noticeable not to excite her suspicion. But for once she kept her counsel and waited.

It was on the fourth morning that, as she was rising from the breakfast table, she announced,

"My niece wished me to tell you that she will see you for a few minutes this morning if you care to come up."

Barnes caught his breath.

"And you waited all this time before you told me!" he exclaimed.

Aunt Philomela raised her eyebrows.

"She is hardly ready at this moment to see you," she observed haughtily.

"I know but —"

Barnes did not finish. What he was going to say was that by delaying the news she had deprived him by just so much of anticipation. On second thought he realized that this would probably not make her feel so badly as it did him.

"Very well, Aunt Philomela," he returned with dignity, "kindly convey my compliments to your niece and tell her I shall be pleased to pay my respects at any time she may suggest."

"Which means I suppose that you 'll come up at about eleven."

"At about eleven," he agreed.

It took the tall clock in the library almost a day to compass the arc between eight and eleven but it was finally accomplished. Before the clock had ceased striking Barnes was on his way upstairs. He was met at the door by Aunt Philomela who

escorted him to her sitting-room where Eleanor lay upon a couch looking not one whit worse for her adventure. The color in her cheeks was even deeper if anything; her eyes full and lustrous, if a bit startled; and her hand-clasp firm.

"It seems silly to lie here," she smiled, "but between Aunt Philomela and Dr. Merriweather, what can one do?"

"Nothing," he agreed. "One might as well be in the hands of Fate."

He took a chair at the head of the couch and Aunt Philomela picking up a bit of lace upon which she was at work sat by the window and proceeded still further to symbolize Fate.

"It 's been very dull in Alaska these last three days," he observed.

"In Alaska?"

"Downstairs is Alaska," he explained.

"But Aunty says that between father and Carl, you 've been very busy."

"I 've had a great many things to think about," he admitted. "One of them concerns your father."

"Daddy?"

Aunt Philomela glanced up from her knitting.

"Yes," he nodded, "it may be necessary for me to make my excuses and leave before very long."

"What do you mean?" demanded Aunt Philomela.

"I mean that Mr. Van Patten is getting very much better. I mean that he may see more than we think he sees."

"His eyesight is returning?" exclaimed the girl, "Oh, that is too good to be true."

"His eyesight," gasped Aunt Philomela flushing red, "you mean — you mean he may yet detect us in this fraud?"

"For all I know he may already have done so," answered Barnes.

The girl rose to her elbow. Aunt Philomela looked upon the point of jumping from the window. "I've noticed," stammered the latter, "that he has made me very uncomfortable these last few days."

"That may be only your conscience," suggested Barnes. "But I — I have no conscience and yet he has made *me* very uncomfortable."

"Dr. Merriweather knows this?" asked the girl.

"He has suspected it. He left it for me to tell you."

"Why, it would be like getting Dad home from a foreign land," cried the girl.

"He would be almost like another prodigal," smiled Barnes.

"Only," she objected, "father has not wasted his substance in riotous living."

"That is n't what makes the prodigal," answered Barnes. "The prodigal need n't be really prodigal. It 's the journey away from home into the far country that makes the prodigal."

"You take great liberty with the Scriptures," snapped Aunt Philomela more to relieve her feelings than anything else.

"Like every artist," answered Barnes unruffled, "I have learned the Bible almost by heart. Do you remember what the father exclaimed when he saw his son?"

Aunt Philomela pretended to resume her knitting.

"Perhaps you can quote it," suggested Barnes.

"Perhaps *you* will," put in the girl to save her aunt's feelings.

"He said," resumed Barnes, slowly. "He said, 'This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and he is found.' Nothing about riotous living. The boy had gone away and came back again. That was all that counted. That is all that will count when Mr. Van Patten comes back from the darkness to you."

So in his own life, he thought, his father was as much the prodigal as he, the son, was. But he said nothing of this.

"If it should be true!" stammered the girl again.

She lost sight of all the complications this involved — lost sight of all the other complications which had worried her before Barnes came upstairs with this news.

"Aunty," she determined, "I must go in at once and see him."

But Barnes motioned her to lie down again.

"Not yet," he advised, "let 's determine first what is best to be done. Aunt Philomela — what do you say?"

Aunt Philomela frowned.

"I say it 's all a pretty pickle," she answered.

"What do *you* say?" asked Eleanor.

"This," answered Barnes. "First of all, I must leave before he recognizes me. Secondly, we must get his real son back to him as soon as possible.

"Yes," agreed the girl. "But will Joe come?"

"I shall send him a wire every day until he does come," said Barnes.

"And when he does come, what will Carl say?" demanded Aunt Philomela.

Barnes smiled.

"I don't know," he answered. "I fear he will be somewhat embarrassed."

Miss Van Patten looked troubled. Here was

another uncomfortable situation to add to the long list of which Barnes was either the direct or indirect cause. She looked at him with what he interpreted as an appeal.

"Perhaps that is n't a very important matter anyway," he suggested.

"Important," snapped Aunt Philomela, "I should call it very important."

"How?" inquired Barnes.

"Because my niece and Mr. Langdon are engaged," she exploded.

CHAPTER XIX

BARNES LEARNS A GREAT TRUTH

If Barnes had tried to paint Eleanor as she looked that moment, he certainly would have had to dip his brush in damson preserves. She turned upon her aunt with a little cry.

"Aunty, you know, for father's sake, we decided it was best not to say anything."

"It 's high time," she stormed back, "that some of us spoke out."

Barnes leaned forward. He extended his hand to the girl.

"I congratulate — Carl," he said.

She took his hand weakly and he rose. He stared about the room a second as though uncertain just what to do or say next. Aunt Philomela, who had assumed a very rigid pose, relaxed at the sight.

"I — I thought you suspected as much anyway," she said.

"Why, yes — I did. Mr. Van Patten spoke of it — Carl spoke of it."

The girl glanced up quickly.

"Carl said he had secured your consent," she observed coolly.

"As a brother I advised him as best I could," he answered. "But when — when did he see you?"

"He came over this morning — against the doctor's advice," put in Aunt Philomela.

"Well," concluded Barnes, a bit inanely, "I must be going."

Upon the words he started for the door.

"You still think that it — it is best for you to leave father?"

"I 'm quite sure of that now," he answered.

Barnes was not one to put off acting upon a resolution. He went down the hall at once, and finding Mr. Van Patten awake put the matter to him as gently as possible.

"Father," he said, "I must go away for a little while — perhaps for a week or two."

"Away?" gasped the old man. "Again?"

There was genuine emotion in the old man's cry. It was a father's cry and it created in Barnes an overwhelming desire for his own. In something of a vision he seemed to see the old proprietor of the Acme echoing this need for *his* son. The little comedy had turned serious. From acting the prodigal he found himself feeling the prodi-

gal. He wanted to get back home — not as represented by the Waldemere, but as embodied in the flesh and blood of those whose name he bore. So it happened that the more this aged gentleman upon the bed expressed the need for a son, the more he stirred in Barnes the need of a father. Barnes turned away his head from the searching blind eyes.

"Only for a little while."

"A little while? My son, I'm living now by only little whiles."

"You're getting stronger every day," said Barnes. "I want to see you sitting up when I come back."

The old gentleman shook his head.

"I don't know. I don't know," he answered.

"Listen," said Barnes, earnestly. "Life is beginning new, in more ways than one, for all of us here. Your happiest days are coming. If you'll hold tight till I get back, I'll prove it."

"I'll try," he answered submissively.

"You must do more than that. You must fight. Will you promise?"

"Yes, boy, yes."

"I'll write to you every day. I'm only going as far as New York."

"All right, Joe. Then — perhaps you had better start right off."

"Two weeks; perhaps less. Good-by."

The old man took his hand. Barnes bent over him and kissed his forehead. Then he went out of the room and back to Eleanor. Here again he saw no reason for delay. In reply to his knock she bade him come in. She was sitting alone in the same position as when he had left her.

"I 've told your father," he said without preamble, "and now I 've come to say good-by to you."

"You 've told Daddy — already?"

"Yes. He bore it very well."

"You 're so hasty," she stammered. "You take away one's breath."

"Some things are best done hastily," he answered.

"But this — why, Aunt Philomela is quite broken up at the idea of your leaving. She — she has had to lie down."

"Then I 'll not disturb her.

"But — you must. She would never forgive you."

She looked as though about to call, but he checked her.

"I must tell you first my plan. If it 's pos-

sible to get a wire through to the boy, I shall do it. If, in the meanwhile, you yourself hear anything from him, you must let me know at once. I 'll leave my address." He took a card from his pocket and handed it to her.

"You are so very kind," she murmured, with a break in her voice.

"I shall write your father every day," he went on, "so perhaps he will not ask many questions."

"I will read the letters to him myself," she said.

He caught his breath. It was a commonplace enough remark but he grasped at it like a compliment.

"Thank you," he answered simply.

Certainly that in itself was a commonplace enough reply, and yet it turned her cheeks scarlet.

When he spoke again it was very deliberately, as though the words really had some profound meaning.

"If I 'm able to get hold of Joe," he said, "I myself shall come back with him."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "that would be so helpful."

"It is my one hope," he answered.

Then, because there was so much more that he wanted to say; then, because th e was so much

he must n't say, he turned his eyes towards Aunt Philomela's room. The girl obeyed his unexpressed desire in some haste.

"Aunty," she called.

She came in, a bit frightened. Certainly in appearance she bore out the girl's statement. All the fight seemed to have gone from her. She was an Aunt Philomela he had never seen before. She was scarcely more than a sweet, lovable old lady who looked very dependent. She came forward uncertainly.

"You 're going?" she exclaimed, in as much astonishment as though this were the first she had heard of it.

He nodded.

"I must start at once. I 'm going to walk to Chester to catch the noon train."

"I — I 'll send John with you," she stammered.

He smiled at the recollection this suggested.

"Thanks," he answered, "but I still prefer to walk. I shall not forget — this time."

Miss Van Patten glanced at him with a queer little smile about her mouth.

"Why — what are we going to do?" asked Aunt Philomela turning to her niece.

"We must do the best we can," answered Miss Van Patten.

"But I don't know, I 'm sure. It will leave us quite alone."

"There is Carl," suggested Barnes.

"Oh, yes," answered Aunt Philomela, "I forgot. There is Carl."

"If I find Joe I may come back for a few days," explained Barnes.

"You 'll come back for a visit anyway, won't you?" asked Aunt Philomela, brightening.

"If I find Joe," answered Barnes.

Here again the girl caught an almost formidable note.

The little old lady moved uneasily.

"I must thank you for all you 've done," she faltered, almost as though this were an apology.

"Please don't thank me," he insisted.

At this opportune moment John entered with a cup of broth for Miss Van Patten.

"John," requested Barnes, as the man put down the cup and was upon the point of leaving, "will you be good enough to pack my bag?"

John looked surprised.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

He paused, coughed, and then blurted out,

"Could I have a moment with you, sir, before you leave?"

It was Barnes' turn to look surprised.

"Why — yes," he agreed.

Barnes turned again to Aunt Philomela.

"You have lost some of your color," he said unexpectedly. "Would you mind if I gave you some good advice?"

She looked bewildered but she shook her head.

"It 's just this," he continued, "don't worry over your accounts."

"No," she answered.

She spoke so mildly that the girl smiled.

"For," he went on didactically, "there 's nothing so bad for the nerves as modern business methods."

The little old lady glanced up to see if he were smiling. He was not. He never was when she suspected him of it.

"I 'm afraid I 'll never get them straightened out again," she sighed.

"So much the better for you," he assured her. "What you really ought to do, Aunt Philomela, is to take up gambling."

"What?" she demanded sharply.

He nodded blandly.

"If I ever have the opportunity I 'll teach you draw poker."

"The least anyone can do at my age is to refrain from acquiring bad habits," she answered.

"On the contrary, your age is the only safe age in which to indulge in them," he argued. "Nothing keeps one so young as the element of uncertainty. That is why I recommend gambling. But you can gamble a little, even with your accounts; you can let them run so that you will never quite know where you stand. Some such excitement would brace you up wonderfully."

"Bah!" she observed, with something of her old-time scorn.

"You made a good beginning," he suggested, "when you bought into 'The Lucky Find.' Mining stocks are always a good gamble."

"'The Lucky Find' was n't even a good gamble," she declared.

John entered with the dress-suit case. Barnes extended his hand to the little old lady. He was a believer in abrupt departures. He disliked the inclined plane of inanities usually accompanying a farewell.

"Au revoir, Aunt Philomela," he said simply.

The little old lady took his hand. Her fingers were trembling.

"You — you have been very kind," she faltered.

"Good-by, Eleanor."

"Good-by," she said.

He turned, and John followed him to the Dutch door.

"I thought," began John, "I'd just like to ask you once more about 'The Lucky Find.' You are still interested in it, sir?"

"Extremely."

"Would you advise me to hold the stock, sir?"

"I'd advise you to hold it for two weeks," answered Barnes.

"Very well, sir. Thank you, sir."

"I think there'll be at least one more dividend," he assured him.

"That's very good, sir. Good luck to you, sir."

"Thank *you*," Barnes answered earnestly. "I need everyone to wish me Good Luck."

He hurried down the path and turned into the road. It had drunk of the sun so long that it was more saffron than ever. And yet what a groveling creature it was! It licked the feet of the houses by its side. What, after all, were the houses? Mere shelters for men. What of these men with their strong legs and the arrogant pose of their heads? The eyes of the women bade them stay and they stayed; bade them go, and they went. Neither the road nor the houses nor the strong-rayed sun could countermand that order. Men went to wars, they went to sea, they pushed through forests, they dared the icy mountains of

the North — for what? Gold? Bah! Where did the gold go, murmured the women who remained behind smiling to themselves? For fame? Who gave them fame questioned the deep eyes of the women? For selfish pleasure? Wherein lay the pleasure until it shone in the eyes of these same women? The road, then, was no worse than the men, and both were a convenience for the women who lived in the houses.

That was all. Barnes saw it clearly enough now.

CHAPTER XX

SO DOES HIS MOTHER

Mrs. Horatio G. Barnes was sitting in lonely grandeur in the drawing-room of her suite at the Waldemere listlessly watching the scant life which crawled along the hot macadamized road below her. She was a tall woman with a serious face which on the whole was really beautiful. Her wistful gray eyes were set between rather high cheek bones and above a nose and mouth wonderfully well formed if a trifle masculine. The warm glow of her fine skin and her abundant white hair relieved them of prominence. She was tastefully dressed in black and wore no jewels save a single large stone guarded by her wedding ring.

The high semi-formal room in which she sat seemed no part of her. She looked as though she had stepped in here as into the waiting-room of one of the more pretentious hotels. In spite of the luxuriousness and the fairly good taste which she had forced upon her surroundings, she rose superior to them. They were too new to match the centuries which

still lingered in her eyes; they were too obvious to match the quiet reserve of her own manner.

She lifted her eyes from the brass-trimmed touring car which slid by on the street below and raised them to the stark blue sky above. The strong family resemblance to her son was then obvious. Her eyes were the same which Barnes had raised to the cotton-blossom clouds. In them there was the same yearning for expression. But the mouth was different; there was no trace here of that shrewd humor which characterized Richard's; nothing but the set capacity for infinite endurance. It was the mouth of a warrior mother. But as the sky gave her imaginings the freedom to roam a world common to her son, her lips grew tender.

She wondered what the boy might be doing at that moment. Perhaps he was sitting by the roadside sketching; perhaps admiring the work of other sketchers in that gallery of which he had spoken in one letter. She wondered if the money she sent him, had safely reached him. It might be as well to send him more if she did n't hear from him by tomorrow. She might even make a flying trip down there to see what he was about. But there was Horatio. She realized that her husband's sole pleasure at the end of those hot days lay in finding her waiting for him here. He had not seemed as well

as usual during this last week. Though he never spoke of it, she suspected that he was missing the boy. At night he tossed uneasily and once she had heard him murmur "Richard" in his troubled dreams.

It was too bad that in spite of his disappointment at losing an heir to his business throne, that he could not understand. Not all men were created with the same ambitions. He himself had left the farm in which his father had taken such pride. If then her boy wished to paint pictures —

She started as she felt a pair of arms about her neck. Looking around she found a brown face next to hers.

"Dick," she cried breathless.

"Home again, mother," he assured her.

"Home," she exclaimed. "I haven't heard you say home for years, Dick"

"Where 's Dad?"

"At the office," she answered sadly. "He has missed you, Dick."

"I 've come back — like a prodigal," he answered, kissing her, "but I 'm not repentant. I 'm going to have a talk with Dad to-night."

She looked a bit frightened.

"But first," he said, "a talk with you. Put on your mildest bonnet and we 'll take a walk in the park."

Without delay she obeyed and stepped with him into the elevator. It was with some pride that she passed through the office by the side of her tall son; it was with a renewed vision of life that she walked with him along the hot street and over the familiar course they had footed together so many times. She noticed with further pride that several passers-by glanced twice at them. She did not realize that this might have been prompted somewhat by her son's costume which, in contrast to her own modish dress and that of the other pedestrians, was strikingly pictu[illegible]que. He still wore his dusty walking-boots, his flannel shirt and loose tie. With his brown skin and erect bearing he looked like a soldier home on a furlough from active service.

In twenty minutes they reached the park which was associated more intimately with his life than any other spot in New York. For it was here that she used to bring him as a child, as a schoolboy, and finally whenever he came home from college. It was here that the first discussions took place on Art versus the Acme; it was here that she threshed out her own conflict of duty to her son and duty to her husband. Until now she had felt that she had failed miserably in attempting to harmonize the hawthorn in her blood with the pine in her husband's. But to-day there was that in her son's

bearing which seemed to give her fresh hope. So they came to their favorite seat and sat down.

"Mother," he began abruptly, "I've learned a great deal in this last week."

"You hinted about your big picture. You have it nearly done?"

"I haven't begun it yet — on canvas," he answered.

"It sounded very attractive as you described it," she encouraged.

"It's a wonderful subject," he exclaimed. "But it's much easier to paint a landscape than —"

He paused. She finished for him,

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"A young woman?"

"Yes."

She was silent for a moment. Then, without looking at him, she rested her hand upon his arm.

"Tell me about her, Dick."

"I had thought of using a big canvas and —"

"Tell me about *her,* Dick."

"You think —"

"That my boy will never be content with a mere picture of her," she interrupted.

"Mother, you're a wizard," he declared.

"Not I," she answered almost a bit sadly. "It is she who is now the wizard."

"It is her eyes," he exclaimed. "Her eyes, her nose, her mouth, her chin, her hair — her soul."

She gently patted his arm still without looking at him. Her own eyes had grown wistful as though in fixing her gaze upon the sunshine which sprinkled through the leaf-shadows she was bidding something good-by.

"Tell me from the first day, Dick," she murmured.

So he began with the sobbing by the letter-box and took her hour by hour through the events of the succeeding days, trying hard to make her see as vividly as possible every detail of them. But when he had concluded, she had clearly in her mind but one picture — that of a young woman painted in a bewildering combination of black and gold and damson preserves. And this woman met her eyes with something of a challenge. She continued to pat her son's arm silently and very gently.

"So there she stands," he ran on, "and every path in this old park seems to lead to her."

He did not notice the quick flash in his mother's eyes, followed by a deepened look of patient resignation. He did not know that he was hurting her.

He did not know that he was making this park a foreign place to her.

He lowered his voice.

"And back there too is Langdon. Mother, do you think I was a fool to leave him?"

"I don't see what else you could do."

"Only that a man has a right to fight for his own — giving and taking no quarter."

"But she is n't your own, Dick."

"No," he admitted, "that 's true. And yet she 's already so big a part of me —"

"Don't worry, boy."

"There 's one other thing I wanted to see you about. I ought to settle down now into some sort of definite work. I might get some sort of a teaching position, I suppose."

"No," she answered quickly. "There 's no need of that."

"Well, there 's always the Acme."

"Nor the Acme either," she said decidedly.

"But here I am twenty-five years old —"

"Dick," she interrupted with some concern, "I don't want to see you change. She would not wish to see you change. You 'll paint good pictures some day. Promise me you 'll not say anything to your father about coming into his business. Promise that to me and — to her."

"Why are you so serious about it?" he asked.

"It is a serious matter. Will you promise?"

"Yes."

"The world is changing for you, Dick," she hurried on, "and the thing to do now is to hold fast to your true self. Don't let the world change *you*."

He was soon off again on another panegyric. She listened with her face grown tender but with that same far away look in her eyes. So they sat until the evening shadows began to creep in and she bethought herself of her husband.

"Be good to him, Dick," she pleaded. "He has missed you. I think he's changed some in this last week. I heard him say once that he might go back to the old farm for a visit."

"Great," exclaimed Barnes. "If we can keep that idea in his head, we'll make a man of him yet."

"Dick!"

"Well, that's what he ought to do — go back there and stay. He ought to live a while now."

As they were returning, she said, for the first time able to disentangle from his narrative a strand other than that of the girl herself,

"I'm glad, Dick, that you had an opportunity to ease the other father. It was a deed worthy of you."

"Ah, if you could see him!"

"And yet I think even if blind I should have known my own," she mused.

"You mothers know more than anyone else in the world," he replied, taking her arm.

"I 'm glad you did it, Dick," she said again. "It may in some way have had its effect upon your own father."

"You 're getting mystical."

"No," she protested, "but I 've never seen him so concerned with matters outside the — Acme. He 's quite changed."

"Shall I tell him about this?"

"No. Let me tell him," she said gently.

She looked up at him proudly. After all, he was hers. If anyone chose to care a great deal about him, why, that other was only caring for her boy. Even if he cared a great deal about someone else, it was still her boy who was caring.

They reached the Waldemere.

"Mr. Barnes has been inquiring for you," announced the clerk.

"I have been to walk with my son," she informed him.

CHAPTER XXI

AN OLD PRODIGAL COMES HOME

Mrs. Barnes retired that night with uneasy foreboding, leaving father and son together. As she went out, she patted her son's shoulder and stooping pressed her lips against his light hair.

Horatio Barnes watched her until the curtains closed behind her, and then faced his son determinedly. He was taller than the latter and heavier. His smooth-shaven face was pale and clouded. A physician would have noted many little danger signals. His expression was that of a man who has summoned all his reserve strength to some grim crisis. Barnes was surprised at the change which had taken place even in the short time he had been away. Aggressiveness had degenerated into petulance; self-confidence into bull-headedness. Yet below all this he saw an outcropping of sentiment which surprised him.

"Well," demanded the father, lighting a black cigar, "what do you propose to do now?"

"Paint," answered Barnes, "harder than ever."

The father scowled.

"Have n't you had enough of that yet?"

Before the mother, the two had avoided this subject.

"No," Barnes answered, "I 'm just awaking to the possibilities in Art."

The father chewed his cigar a moment.

"Boy," he said finally, "this business here is getting too big for me alone. I can't hold on much longer."

"Then chuck it," advised Barnes.

For another minute the father silently chewed his cigar. He kept control of himself because to do so meant just one chance of keeping control of this business.

"The Acme," he resumed with an effort, "needs Youth. It needs someone who can put in twenty hours a day and not come to the office the next morning with a twitching face."

"What it needs, then," suggested Barnes, "is a man of cast-iron — with a scroll on his forehead."

"It 's a big business," went on the father with unexpected calmness. "It 's a business to be proud of. It 's a business that a young man would take over with forty years already put into it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Barnes, "is n't that enough of good red years to feed into cook-stoves?"

Barnes, Sr., rose to his feet. He paced the room once or twice. He looked like a man fighting off bankruptcy. Barnes pitied him — pitied him from the bottom of his heart. But that was no reason why he should help him to his doom.

"God!" exclaimed the father, taking a stand directly in front of the boy, "I wonder how you ever happened to be a son of mine!"

"I *am* a son of yours," answered Barnes, coolly, "but I am no son of the Acme's. Sit down, father. Don't tear yourself to pieces. Let me make a proposition of my own."

He placed his hands upon his father's shoulders.

"Dad," he said soberly, "I want you to take up Art."

Barnes, Sr., met his son's eyes a moment in astonished stupefication. Then he sank weakly into his chair. Which left Barnes standing with the appearance of occupying the superior position.

"Dad," he ran on, "I 'm serious. This damned business of the Acme must be stopped. You 've sat in your office down there until you 're baked as dry as though you had been sitting in one of your own ovens. It 's burning the soul out of you. I 've seen these last few days just how small at best a cook-stove is."

The older man made no reply, but his lips began

to twitch. Barnes seated himself before those twitching lips and resumed.

"I 've been down where people live. Dad, I 've been back on a farm — just such another farm as gave you the strength to be alive to-day in spite of the way you 've misused your strength. I 've been back where trees count for something and where the blue sky is a big item of return for the day's work. I 've been back where you still see the sun in the daytime and the stars at night. I 've been with an old man who expected to have to leave those things — who would then have given every cent he had to stay another day in the midst of it. If you had strewn cook-stoves end to end across the continent, he would not have swapped five breaths of night air for the whole of them."

The old man scowled up at him as though wondering if he had lost his reason.

"I ought to have taken you along on that walk with me," ran on Barnes, reminiscently. "It would have shown you what life can mean. You ought to have stood on the hill with me and watched the cotton-blossom clouds. It would have helped you understand that look in mother's eyes which puzzles you every time you boast of another hundred thousand. You think you are rich and powerful. But listen to this; you have n't money enough in

all your banks to buy one minute of that single week of me. You think I 've been idle, but let me give you an inventory: five minutes on a hill-top — value five thousand dollars; ten minutes by a letter box - - value ten thousand dollars; a half hour with Aunt Philomela — value thirty thousand dollars; an hour by a trout stream — value one hundred thousand dollars; an hour in the library, value — "

" Bah, you 're a fool! " broke in Barnes, Sr.

" I 'll submit to any jury who 's the greater fool — you or I," answered Barnes, calmly.

" D' ye think you can live on such dream money as that? " demanded the father.

" Better than you are living on what you have," declared his son.

He paused a minute and then added soberly.

" My capital would buy for mother what you have n't been able to buy with yours. It would n't leave her in June staring out of a window at a macadamized road."

" What 's that? " demanded the father, straightening up.

" It would n't leave her to sit alone and wonder when you 're going to drop with apoplexy," he went on calmly.

He was almost brutal, and he knew it. It seemed

the only way. To drive a new fact into that steel-chilled brain one had to use a sledge hammer. And Barnes realized that it was now or never.

"You — you think your mother is not happy?"

"Dad," answered Barnes, "figure it out for yourself. Mother came from a green land — a land where even the fences are made of hawthorn; where even in the heart of London the sheep still nibble the grass; where acres of green grass are within walking distance of the Bank of England. The love of open spaces is in her blood. Yet you 've taken her and shut her up here in this damned cage, and here you leave her all day long, only to come home at night with your face twitching. She is n't doing any grumbling. She is n't that kind. I 've never heard a word of complaint out of her. But I 've eyes that are n't covered up with sheet iron. When I saw her to-day I felt like helping her escape as though she were in prison."

"Lord, boy!"

"What are you giving her?" demanded Barnes, pressing home his point. "Only this," he answered, waving his hand about the apartments. "And yet she 's kept your books for you and stood by you for forty years. You remember your own boyhood. I 've heard you tell about those fair days back on the farm. Why don't you give her a bit

of that to remember? Why don't you chuck a few flowers and a ray of sunshine into her life? I've given her more than you have, myself; I've taken her out in the park. Why don't you take her back to the best days of your life? It's time you had a honeymoon. It's time you lifted her face to the dew. It's time you let the sun beat down upon her a while."

The father had dropped his cigar. He fixed his worried eyes upon his son. He looked as though he were stunned. Barnes lowered his voice.

"I want you to see this, Dad," he went on. "I want you to see it for her sake and your sake. I don't think we have grown very far apart — you and I. If I'm not the son of your brain, I'm the son of your heart. I've been sitting by the side of an old man and he made me see that."

The father met his boy's eyes.

"It hurt to have you go, Dick," he said.

"It was an act of Providence," declared the latter. "If I hadn't, we might have gone on this way until — it was too late to do anything."

"To do anything?"

"Too late for you to take up Art."

The father glanced up with the old evil spirit again in his eyes.

"Don't go back to that," he pleaded.

"Why not? That 's what you 've got to do. And after all, you 're an artist in your own way. Look at the scroll on the Acme doors! Look at your stand against the Union! That was a stroke of art. Art is nothing but independence. Art is nothing but being yourself — expressing yourself. You 've done that consistently whenever you 've really been yourself. You did n't stop to consider how much you were going to lose in shekels when you told the crowd you 'd go busted by yourself rather than make a fortune under them."

Horatio Barnes smiled grimly.

"No one but a true artist could have done that," insisted the son. "Any other would have reckoned the cost and swallowed the pill."

"But I beat 'em," chuckled the father.

"Art beats every time," declared Barnes. "It 's the one thing a man may pin his faith to. But that was n't your biggest piece of work as an artist. You transcended that. You really proved yourself when you married mother. It was then that you were true to your highest standard, because then you were truest to yourself. You could have married a fortune had you chosen and saved yourself twenty years of hard work. You could have married old Arbuckle's daughter and placed the Acme where it is to-day two decades ago. Are you sorry you did n't?"

"Sorry!" exploded the father. "Your mother, sir, is worth more to me than all the money in the Bank of England."

"Of course she is. That 's bully of you, Dad. And you 've lived up to that. You 've fought for Art in fighting for her against Lord Dunnington and all his caddish tribe. Like any good artist, you 'd sacrifice every round dollar to make her stand well before them. That is n't business, it 's Art. It 's living up to your ideal against all the world."

"But," protested the father, "that is n't painting pictures."

"Lord forgive your blindness, Dad," Barnes exclaimed. "Painting pictures is only one little way of expressing yourself. A man may be a great artist without ever having held a brush. A man may be a great artist in song, in verse, in prose, in life, even in business. But in business you must n't forget that back of it lies life. That 's where you slipped up. You forgot that you 're here to live — to give life to Mother, your masterpiece. To be sure, I 've chosen to paint pictures. That seemed to me the only way in which I could live up to my best. But that does n't make me any better or worse than you. The whole game is to get broad and big through whatever you do."

"Then why should n't I stick to business?"

"Because you are n't getting big; because you 've gone stale. You need a change."

Barnes, Sr., shifted in his chair. He reached for his cigar-box. That was a good sign.

"I — I don't know but what you 're right, Dick," he admitted.

"I 'm sure of it, Dad."

"I 've thought lately that it — it would n't be bad to take your mother back to the old place."

"Do it! Do it!" exclaimed Barnes. "Make up your mind to-night. Decide before you go to bed."

"That means giving up opening a — London office."

"You 've too many offices already. Cut 'em down. Tell mother you 're thinking of taking a rest, and you 'll see her grow ten years younger."

"You think that she — "

But the question was answered by the mother herself who stole through the door in her dressing-gown. Her cheeks were pale with worry. In negligee she appeared so much older and tired that Barnes was startled. He crossed to her side, placed an arm about her waist, and led her to his chair.

"What is it, mother?" he asked.

"Nothing. Only — it 's very late. What have you two been talking about?"

"Ask Dad," he replied.

She turned her worried eyes upon her husband. The latter too saw for the first time the years in his wife's face. He quailed.

"Horatio," she cried, "what 's the matter? Are you ill?"

He roused himself.

"Wife," he said, rising to his feet. "Wife."

He placed an arm about her. He threw back his shoulders.

"Wife," he announced with emphasis, "I 'm going to take up Art!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE BLIND SEE

Barnes was awakened the next morning by a gentle tap at his door. He thought it was John. But, in answer to his response, his mother entered. She looked as fresh as a girl of twenty. Her face was radiant. She crossed swiftly to his bedside.

"Oh, Dicky boy," she cried joyously, "there 's been a miracle! The prodigal father has come back home."

"Miracle?" questioned Barnes, patting her hand. "What about my part in it?"

"Why, you," exclaimed the mother, "you 're the miracle."

Barnes smiled. It was just so Dr. Merriweather had answered him when he had put a similar question about Carl. He was learning something about how miracles are performed. It seemed as though if you loved mightily it was possible to accomplish most anything. And yet, in the supreme undertaking of his life, where he had loved most, he had lost. All night long he had wondered about this.

At this moment Horatio Barnes himself strided

in, dressed in a bath-robe and slippers that would n't stay on.

"Morning, Dick," he shouted, "I 'm going to keep a herd of Jerseys. In the old days Mitchell used to beat us all hollow on stock, but I 'll have some this time that will make his eyes stick out. I hope there are a few Mitchells left to watch me carry off the blue ribbons. Suppose they still hold the County Fair?"

"Have n't a doubt of it," answered Barnes, enthusiastically, "but I 'm afraid we won't be able to get in for it this Fall."

"Won't?" snorted the father. "How much time do you want? I 'll have a herd within a week or know the reason why."

"Steady, steady," his son cautioned. "Remember there are tenants on the old farm at present."

"I 'll move 'em out bag and baggage within a month. I 'll do it if it costs twenty thousand dollars."

"Whew," whistled Barnes, "but when you do make up your mind — "

"I don't wait," answered the senior. "There 's another thing I want settled right off. I 'm going to start a close corporation for the promotion of Art. I 'll appoint myself president of the company and make you vice-president, treasurer, secretary,

and general manager on a salary of five thousand a year."

"You what?"

"Our offices will be on the farm. I'll touch up the fences, while you attend to the sunsets."

"This is a joke?"

"Not by a good deal," snorted Barnes, Sr. "If you're in for that sort of thing, I'm going for once to put it on a paying basis. If you'll paint your mother as she looks this minute, I'll pay you ten thousand cash for the job."

Barnes turned towards her.

"I don't believe I can do it," he answered, "but I'll try."

"Then it's a bargain?"

"A bargain," answered Barnes, gripping his father's hand.

That morning Barnes sent off a second telegram to Joe. It read,

"This is a case of life or death. Come home."

Then he sat down to write a letter to the other father and through the father to Her. She had said that she would read these letters herself. Her hands would hold the paper; her eyes would scan the script; her lips would utter the words. If the waiting father were able to do nothing more, Barnes thanked him for this priceless privilege of

"Do you remember," he asked gently, "what I told you about the true adventurers?"

See page 328

thus indirectly furnishing him the means for talking a bit each day with Her.

The letters were necessarily vague and rambling. Barnes spoke mysteriously of business, of men seen and others to be seen, of the necessity of waiting here for word from one who he hoped in the end would relieve him of all his mining ventures.

"I await a reply, which should reach me any day now," he wrote. "When it arrives, I 'll come back. Give my love to Aunt Philomela and to Eleanor."

It was two days later that he received an answer in Eleanor's own handwriting. At sight of the envelope he felt for a moment as though all his wildest dreams had come true — as though he were to find within all that he hungered to hear from her. But it turned out to be nothing but a quiet gossipy letter about Aunt Philomela and of course chiefly about her father. He was improving daily, and Dr. Merriweather was now quite sure he was to recover his sight. He spent all his waking hours in talking of his boy.

"Oh," she concluded, "Joe *must* come home now. Not even you could save Daddy from the blow which would follow should the boy refuse. I am waiting every minute for a telegram from him. With a heart full of gratitude to you, I remain, sincerely yours, Eleanor Van Patten."

That day Barnes sat in the park from lunch to sunset with his mother. Both he and she agreed that the only significant feature of the letter was that it contained no mention of Carl.

So a restless week passed, the most important incident of which, outside his daily letter from Eleanor, was the fact that Barnes, Sr., received an offer for the Acme and in his usual impetuous fashion closed with it in twenty-four hours. He came home that momentous day at three instead of five, and save for the time when Barnes, Sr., received her promise to be his wife, he never received a finer reward than that which greeted his announcement to her of this decision.

"And so, you old prodigal," choked Barnes, as he grasped his father's hand, "you 've come home, too."

"Prodigal?" stammered his father, though with tears in his eyes.

"Think of all the years you 've wasted in riotous earning," exclaimed the son. "You can thank old Van Patten for your conversion. You two men have got to meet. He wasted five years in riotous pride. But he 's come home, too, now. We 're all home except Joe, and — well, I 'm back in the *old* home any way."

"What do you mean, sonny?"

"Nothing. I 'm going to get Joe back now if I have to go to Alaska for him, that 's all."

It was no easy matter to keep Barnes, Sr., in New York during the following week, but for that matter it was no easy matter for Barnes himself to stay. But he could n't leave until he had settled this other affair, and his father refused even to visit the old farm without him. In the meanwhile, too, Mr. Van Patten became insistent. He had been able to see his daughter and sister for the first time in three years, and now was eager almost to the point of petulance to see his son. He could not understand why the boy could n't come down for a day at least. It was becoming more and more difficult to quiet him. The girl showed plainly enough in her letters the distress under which they all labored. Matters were fast reaching a crisis.

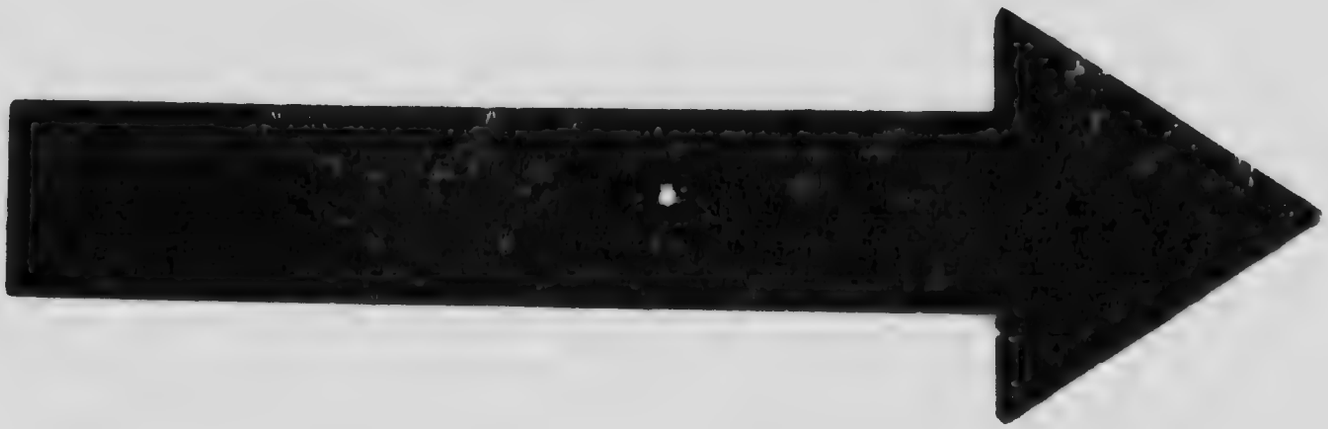
It was at this point that he received the wire from Eleanor.

"Joe on way home. Don't know when he will get here. You 'd better come back if you can."

Come back? Nothing else counted. He found his mother in her dressing-room kneeling before a trunk filled with old letters.

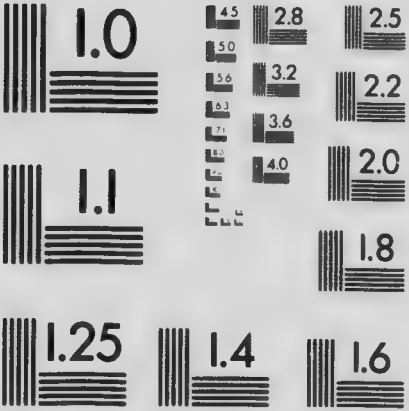
"Mother," he whispered, "I take the next train for Chester."

She looked up with moist eyes.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

"Give her — my love," she said.

"But mother — "

"No matter how it turns out, Dick. My boy loves her, so — I love her too."

"Tell Dad," choked Barnes, "I haven't time to see him."

Barnes boarded the train with all the excitement of a boy making his first journey. He took a seat in the smoking-car, filled his pipe, and adjusting his knees comfortably against the wooden card-table before him, settled down to deep reflection. A man with an obtrusive arrangement of a large dress-suit case and much rattling of newspapers took the seat facing him. He would meet her, Barnes dreamed, in the sitting-room. She would wear her China silk with the polka dots in it. It would be at about sunset time, so that the gold in her hair would be more than ever in evidence as it always was when the sun took it slantwise. The ivory forehead would be flushed with the lightest crimson; her lips would be like damson preserves; and she would hold herself like a Venetian noblewoman.

His thoughts were interrupted by the voice of the stranger.

"The lies which are circulated about Alaska," declared the latter with spirit, "would fill a book."

Barnes glanced up at the man with some interest.

He saw a young fellow with a decent if somewhat brazen face. His wide felt hat was set at a rakish angle and his clothes were a trifle over emphasized. The fellow was evidently referring to something he had read in the New York paper which he held in his big hand.

"They ought to jail men who slander a country like that," he further declared.

"What 's the trouble?" inquired Barnes.

"Trouble? Why, the man who wrote this could n't have been within a thousand miles of Alaska. The stuff is libel — nothing else. You 'd think from this that the place was up near the North Pole somewhere; you 'd think all we had to eat was icicles; you 'd think we lived in huts and wore a couple of feet of fur the year round. You 'd think we were all a gang of wild Indians who would n't know a street car by sight."

"Well," observed Barnes, straightening up, "I suppose you *do* lack many of the modern conveniences."

"Not by a good deal," answered the stranger with heat. "We 've got everything a red-blooded man needs."

"You hail from Alaska yourself?" inquired Barnes with growing interest.

"You bet I do."

"Ever happen to hear of a town called 'The Last Chance'?"

"Heard of it? Why, I live there."

"Then," faltered Barnes, "did you ever happen to hear of one Van Patten?"

He held his breath for the answer.

"Hear of it? Why, that 's my name!"

"Not Joe Van Patten?"

"Joe Van Patten."

Barnes pressed down the ashes in his pipe. He relighted the tobacco with deliberate carefulness.

"You seem to know me," broke in the young man uneasily, "but I 'm hanged if I remember you."

"No. My name is Barnes. I met your family a while ago."

"Is that a fact?" exclaimed Van Patten.

The information seemed to check rather than promote loquaciousness on the part of the young man. He settled back uneasily in his seat and drummed nervously on the table. Barnes discerned now a certain family resemblance which would have been more pronounced had the man been in more conventional Eastern garb. There was nothing in his face to indicate viciousness — at worst nothing but stubbornness and selfishness.

"I understand you 're interested in mining?"

began Barnes, in the hope of getting him to talk again.

"Up to my neck."

"You left 'The Lucky Find' well?" he inquired much as John had inquired of him.

"You mean to say they have n't heard back here of the strike?"

"Strike?"

"'The Lucky Find,'" announced Van Patten, "is to-day the best paying mine within a hundred miles of 'The Last Chance.'"

Barnes nodded. After all, when analyzed, that was not necessarily a very rash statement.

"Why, look here," exclaimed Van Patten, "take a peek at this."

And before Barnes' astonished gaze Van Patten spread out one of the identical gorgeous certificates which he himself had described to Aunt Philomela. There it was within touch — the very thing he had seen the man draw out when sitting in the hut by the side of three-fingered Bill. He was glad to have one thing at least substantiated. It was swirled over with a bewildering design of engraved spirals. Across its face the name of the mine was dashed in a flourishing script that reminded him of the exhibition writing of an old-time teacher of penmanship. Each certificate proclaimed that it

represented one hundred shares of stock in 'The Lucky Find' — par value one hundred dollars. Barnes held the crinkling papers in his hand a moment as though suspecting still that this was only some particularly vivid piece of dreaming.

"Just had these made in New York," explained Van Patten.

"They are very pretty," commented Barnes.

"And growing prettier every day," answered Van Patten. "That stock is at a premium. A month ago we struck it rich — real gold this time."

The man spoke as though he, at least, believed it.

"That ought to be good news for the stockholders," said Barnes, thinking of John.

"It will put every mother's son of 'em where they need do no more worrying," declared Van Patten proudly.

He sank back comfortably into his seat as though this statement settled satisfactorily most of the big affairs of the universe.

If what the boy said was true, Barnes was very glad for those back in the mellow brick house. It would simplify Aunt Philomela's accounts and make John's gray hairs less pathetic.

"You came East to place your stock on the market?" inquired Barnes with fresh suspicion.

"I 've come back to make good," answered Van Patten. "I 've come back to pay some of my debts."

"That ought to make you a welcome visitor."

"I don't know," faltered Van Patten with what appeared to be more or less genuine emotion. "I can't say that I 've used my folks very well."

"How long since you 've been home?" asked Barnes.

"Not for years."

"Years?"

"Dad and I had a bit of a scrap, and I cut."

"Heard from him lately?"

"A month or so ago I got a letter. He was sick and wanted me to come home, but I was strapped and I could n't. It was just before we made the strike. I would n't tell him I was busted. When you quit home with your dander up, you want to make good before you come back, don't you?"

"It saves your pride," admitted Barnes.

He met Van Patten's eyes with frank friendliness. He found himself beginning to sympathize in a way with the man.

"I suppose Dad thought I did n't use him very well," ran on Van Patten, "but that can't be helped now. I 'll square things with him when I see him."

Barnes waited.

"Say," exclaimed Van Patten with enthusiasm, "I 'm going to give the Dad the time of his life in these next few years. I 'm going to show him something of this country. He 's been too busy to travel, but I 'm going to make him go back to Alaska with me. Why, do you know we 've got a country up there as large as all the United States east of the Mississippi river if you take out Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and West Virginia?"

"Yes," answered Barnes, mildly. "I knew that."

"Why, there 's over half a million square miles up there."

"To be exact, five hundred and eighty-six miles."

Van Patten leaned forward.

"Say, stranger," he exclaimed, "do you come from there?"

"In a way."

"Where 's your claim?"

"I — well, you see I have n't located it yet."

"How long you been down?"

"Not long."

"Give us your hand."

Barnes extended his hand.

"I wish we were traveling farther the same way," declared Van Patten.

The train was even then drawing close to the little

station huddled in among the houses. Van Patten began to gather up his traps.

"I get off here," explained Van Patten.

Barnes, too, rose.

"So do I," he announced.

CHAPTER XXIII

A YOUNG PRODIGAL COMES HOME

Once upon the platform, Van Patten looked around with the query,

"Which way you going?"

"Up your way," answered Barnes, nodding in the direction of the brick house. "Won't you walk a bit with me?"

"I don't know but what I will," answered the other. "I have n't anything but a dress-suit case, and I feel like stretching my legs."

Barnes led the way, and the other fell into step at his side. The road was going in the right direction now. It was as though every dusty fern, every whispering birch, every stalwart pine pointed towards the brick house. And Eleanor herself seemed very close to him. It was as though she were keeping pace the other side of him. How the old world sang of her! The sun was dropping towards the horizon line, seeking, as he knew, her black hair. An oriole, high in an elm, was caroling her name. The lazy locusts were rattling like gray-haired crones over their tea — of her.

He felt his attitude towards Van Patten changing. The keen sentences which he had framed by the bedside of the sick father lost their edge with every foot he neared her. All the passion and bitterness went from them. There still remained the fact of the thoughtless wording of the letter, but he seemed to be less and less the man to play the judge upon it. This man by his side was not he whom he had pictured by the letter-box. Yet he kept repeating to himself that the son had not come back at a sick man's call; that he had left his father to his loneliness. There still remained the duty, which surely fell upon him rather than her, of telling this man what had happened. He braced himself to this task.

"Lord," exclaimed Van Patten after they had proceeded the matter of a hundred rods in silence, "father will be surprised. Eleanor wrote that his eyes had gone back on him. It 's hard luck to be blind at such a time of year, is n't it?"

"I think there 's also a bit of a surprise waiting for *you*," said Barnes.

The boy stopped in his tracks.

"A surprise?" he repeated anxiously. "You don't mean to tell me that father — that anything — "

"He has partially recovered his sight," put in

Barnes, glad to relieve the look in the young man's eyes.

Van Patten dropped his suit-case. He took out a handkerchief and ran it over his forehead.

"Gad!" he exclaimed. "You frightened me. But that — why, that 's the best news ever. That 's something like."

"There 's still another surprise," began Barnes. "I — perhaps we 'd better sit down here by the side of the road a minute. There are two or three things you ought to know before you see your father."

"What 's that?"

"Nothing serious," Barnes reassured him, "but what I 've got to tell you may strike you as a bit queer. I have n't got used to it yet myself."

Barnes sat down beneath a big pine and Van Patten, watching him uneasily, took a place beside him.

"You see," began Barnes, "when your letter came a month ago, affairs at the house were in a bad way."

"Guess I was a bit hasty in that letter," stammered Van Patten.

"Under the circumstances, you were," agreed Barnes. "Your father was in bad shape — sort of pining away for you."

"For me? I did n't think he cared that much."

"He cared a great deal," said Barnes. "So, for that reason, we did n't show him your letter."

"You did n't?" exclaimed Van Patten eagerly.

"We tore it up."

Van Patten gave a sigh of relief, but the next second he looked curiously at this stranger who evidently had played so important a part in his personal affairs.

"Excuse me," he said finally, "but just where did *you* come in?"

"At the arrival of the letter," answered Barnes. "I happened to be passing."

"Where?"

"The letter-box."

"But I don't see —"

"Your sister received the letter. She was crying over it when I came along. She was afraid if she read it to your father it would kill him."

"Gee! I did n't know it was that bad. I was busted and sore and — but I did n't mean to make it that bad."

"Sometimes letters sound worse than we intend when we write them."

"But you?" persisted Van Patten.

"I was a stranger, but when I heard your sister

crying, I stopped. She was very much excited, and on the spur of the moment she confided in me. I advised her to tear up the letter."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed the boy, "but I don't see yet where you came in."

"Then we talked over how we could prevent your father from knowing you didn't intend to come home. You see if he had learned that he would have just dropped his head back on the pillow and died."

"And I thought he never wanted to lay eyes on me again!"

"He grew young while he was sick," explained Barnes. "He came back home while he was sick, and he wanted you again."

"But how did you manage it? How —"

"I played the prodigal," explained Barnes, simply. "I took your part."

"You made him believe you were me?"

"Exactly."

"And he *did* believe it?"

"He was blind and very anxious. So he believed."

For a moment Van Patten stared at Barnes in silence. Then he stammered,

"Stranger, I reckon I owe you more than Dad does."

"Neither of you owes me anything," answered Barnes.

"We 'll settle that later," said Van Patten, earnestly. "But Dad — did n't he call your bluff at all?"

"No. I left when his sight began to improve."

"How 'd you work that?"

"I told him I had to go to New York on business. From New York I wired you, and — here you are."

"I never got your wires," answered Van Patten, "but, thank God, here I am."

"You 'll have to back me up in what I told him about Alaska," smiled Barnes.

"Lord," gasped Van Patten, "you did go the limit. But trust me to play out the game."

Barnes stared dreamily across the road.

"I suppose," he hesitated, "I ought to go along with you for a day or two."

"I 'll need you," said the boy, reaching for his hand.

"But your father must n't meet me. It won't do to allow him to make comparisons. Once he sees you with his own eyes, he 'll put aside all doubts. The others will have to know, of course, but we can keep them quiet."

"The others?" questioned Van Patten.

"Carl, for one," answered Barnes. "Your sister, I understand, is engaged."

"Sis engaged?"

Van Patten made his feet.

"I guess," he said, "it's time I got home right away."

The two started again and on the rest of the short walk Barnes devoted himself more to details. As well as he was able, Barnes sketched rapidly the minor events of those two weeks and repeated once more stories he had made up for the father. Van Patten listened intently, but he groaned at mention of three-fingered Bill and the description of the hut.

"Gad!" he exclaimed, "it's a crime to back up such yarns as those, but I suppose you did the best you could."

"The best I could," answered Barnes, soberly.

"And it's my fault anyway," put in the boy quickly. "I'm not long on religion, but if conversion means anything, I guess it means just the changed way I feel now about father and home. I've got you to thank for that."

"I converted myself in the process," smiled Barnes, "which is more than some preachers do."

He passed the place by the road where he had found the girl lying bruised on the grass, and from this point on, his lips were set. But when he came

in sight once more of the little brick house, his jaws relaxed a trifle. It looked as warm and peaceful and sunshiny as it had the first day he saw it. He led the way to the little Dutch door, and lifted the brass knocker. It sent an echo through the house which was answered by John. The latter looked both startled and pleased.

"Is Eleanor able to come downstairs?" inquired Barnes.

"Yes, sir. She said she was expectin' you."

"Then you 'll ask her to step into the sitting-room?"

Van Patten followed his leader uneasily, and paced the room almost as though fearing this interview. But when his sister appeared he had reached her side in a jiffy.

"Sis," he cried, "I 'm back — back home!"

She hesitated the fraction of a second, her eyes upon Barnes. The latter bowed without speaking.

"Joe," she murmured doubtfully.

But the boy seized her in his arms almost fiercely.

"You are n't afraid of me, little sister?" he exclaimed.

"Joe, Joe," she trembled, and lifted her lips to his.

From upstairs came the fairy tinkle of a silver bell. Barnes started. The girl looked wildly about.

"That 's Dad," she exclaimed.

Barnes stepped forward.

"Your father sees quite clearly now?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," she gasped. "What — what are we going to do?"

"Joe must go to him," insisted Barnes. "Send Aunt Philomela down to me."

Joe himself looked frightened. He hesitated.

"Tell your father," suggested Barnes, "that you 've had word 'The Lucky Find' is on its feet. He 'll be so glad for you that he 'll forget everything else."

"But if he suspects?" gasped Joe.

"If worst comes to worst," said Barnes, "send for me. We 'll have to tell him then."

Joe turned towards the door. Barnes placed his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

"Keep your nerve," he warned, "and play the game hard. That 's what we 've all been doing here — even Aunt Philomela."

Eleanor escorted her brother to the old man's room and without waiting came down immediately with her aunt. Both women were quite breathless. They stood close together as though half expecting to hear a scream. Barnes crossed at once to Aunt Philomela and took her frail hand.

"Buck up," he advised. "The boy will carry it through."

"Oh," she answered, "I 'm so glad that *you* are here!"

"Thank you," answered Barnes. "Had n't you both better be seated?"

Aunt Philomela obeyed humbly and took a chair near the window. Eleanor remained standing by her side.

Barnes thought the girl looked paler than when he had left. She seemed less sure of herself. The strain of the last few weeks had told upon her. He felt a strange lightness of the head as he noticed these things. The phrases he had formulated to say on the way down here all vanished and in their place came a dozen swift sentences which he had no right to utter. Consequently, he was dumb and the silence became embarrassing. Aunt Philomela broke the tension a little by exclaiming,

"I would n't live through this last week again for a hundred million dollars."

"Nor I," answered Barnes, briefly.

Aunt Philomela glanced up quickly.

"How does Joe look?" she demanded.

"Not at all as I feared," stammered the girl.

"Blood tells," nodded Aunt Philomela with a trace of her old spirit.

The two women listened. Barnes himself half expected to hear at any second the warning tinkle of the silver bell. He roused himself.

"How is Carl's arm?" he inquired.

Both women started. It was Aunt Philomela who replied,

"It is getting along very well, I believe."

Miss Van Patten caught her breath and looked away. Barnes noticed it. He sought her eyes with a question. She flushed scarlet. Upon the moment he determined to see Carl as soon as he could leave.

Like three discussing a grave crisis in a sick room, they talked on in strained, jerky little sentences until Joe came down again. At the boy's entrance, Aunt Philomela arose. It was clear at a glance that Van Patten was unnerved, but it was also clear that he had succeeded. He came direct to Aunt Philomela with his hand extended.

"Well, Joe?" she stammered.

"Aunt," he answered unsteadily, "I 've paid big for all my cussedness."

The little old lady took his hand and patted his shoulder. He turned to Barnes.

"And, ye gods," he added solemnly, "Alaska has paid big, too!"

CHAPTER XXIV

MAN TO MAN

As Barnes hurried through the little Dutch door on his way to see Langdon, he felt like an exchanged prisoner going to rejoin his colors. He was conscious of one big emotion — that of freedom. However slight the chances, so long as a man may fight, victory is at least within his grasp. Yet Barnes was neither confident nor even sanguine. His thoughts did not go so far as to speculate upon the result. It was enough that he need no longer remain passive.

His plan was simple. He would tell Langdon the whole story and claim the rights of which he had been deprived. He would claim the privilege of ignoring the engagement which had not yet been publicly announced, which had not as yet even been announced to her father, so far as it might restrict him in any honorable approach to the girl. He would make Langdon see that he did not do this presumptuously, but simply on the ground that he was entitled to fight for his pictures as Langdon fought for his symphonies. Eleanor would, of

course, remain in ignorance of the agreement. She was unrestrained by any code and so could then choose, if at all, as her heart dictated.

Barnes found Langdon dressed and sitting in the sun before the house with his arm in a sling. He had lost both weight and color. He greeted Barnes with what seemed like a genuine welcome.

"I guess we 're all glad to see you back, Joe," he said earnestly. "They 've been devilish uneasy up at the other house without you."

"I don't wonder," answered Barnes. "Some devilish queer things have been happening up there during these last few weeks."

Carl glanced up quickly.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Barnes sat down on the turf a little way from Langdon and stared at the saffron road. The tawny ribbon seemed such an integral part of all the strange occurrences of this last month that he turned to it now, as to a comrade, for help in explaining.

"In some ways," he began, "because you 're an artist it makes it easier to tell you; but in other ways that fact makes it harder."

Langdon leaned forward anxiously.

"What 's the trouble?" he demanded. "Is anything wrong — up there?"

"I don't know about that," answered Barnes, "but something is wrong right here."

"With you, Joe?"

"With you and me," answered Barnes.

Langdon paused for a moment, and then, through half-closed lips, he groaned, "Yes, something is wrong with me. But how did you know?"

Barnes lifted his eyes and studied the strained white face of the other. It was his turn to be surprised. He glanced at the bandaged arm.

Langdon shook his head.

"No," he answered, "it is n't that."

"Then —"

"It 's your sister, Joe," explained Langdon. "There 's something about her I don't understand. She has n't been herself since you left."

Barnes interrupted him.

"Don't tell me any more," he commanded.

"I 've been waiting for this chance to talk it over with you, Joe."

"I have n't any right to listen," Barnes hurried on. "But I have something to say to you — that — that may help you out. Only I don't know just how to begin. I want you to understand, in the first place, that we 've all been as square as we knew how — that what has happened has been, in a way, inevitable."

Langdon sat as fixed as a marble statue. Barnes turned his eyes back to the saffron road.

"You see," he began, "it all came about by chance. I was walking along this road when I found her by the letter-box, crying."

"Found who?" demanded Langdon.

"Eleanor. She had just received a letter from her brother, saying he would n't come home."

Langdon looked dazed.

"From her brother?"

"From Joe. You see I 'm not her brother at all."

Langdon rose slowly from his chair. Barnes too rose. He forgot for the moment his own rights in this matter. He felt as though he were confessing to an imposition. It occurred to him that this was just the way that Aunt Philomela must have first looked upon the plan.

"Then who the devil are you?" demanded Langdon, agressively.

"No relation to the family at all," answered Barnes. "To you — just a fellow artist."

Langdon turned his eyes towards the brick house. He repeated almost automatically,

"No relation at all. Just a fellow artist."

"And Joe himself," ran on Barnes, "is up there now. He came back to-day."

Langdon tottered. Barnes seized his arm.

"Sit down, old man," he urged.

But Langdon shook himself free and stepping back a pace stared like a man at bay. The attitude helped Barnes to justify himself again. They stood now man to man.

"Langdon," said Barnes, quietly, "the position was easier for you than it was for me. I was forced to listen —"

"You might have saved me from confiding in you," broke in Langdon through half-closed lips.

"Saved you?" answered Barnes. "Don't you think I would have saved myself that, if it had been possible?"

"It must have seemed like a good joke to you," said Langdon.

Barnes caught his breath.

"No," he answered slowly, "it wasn't much of a joke."

He hesitated and then went on,

"Perhaps when I 'm done, you can see just how much of a joke it was."

Langdon stepped forward.

"You don't mean —"

Barnes nodded.

"Exactly," he answered. "I mean that all the time I have felt the same towards Eleanor that you do. I mean that I have been fighting for my pictures just as you have been fighting for your symphonies.

The difference is that — until Joe came back — I have had to fight myself, too. I have had to stand back helpless and look on."

"And now?" demanded Langdon.

Barnes took a long breath. He met Langdon's hot eyes steadily.

"And now," he said, "I've come to claim my rights."

"What are they?" inquired Langdon.

"The privilege of making my love known to her — the privilege of winning her if I can. The privilege," he added slowly, "of putting that sunrise we looked at together into colors as you would put it into music."

For a moment Langdon stared at him in silence. Then he groped for his chair. He sat leaning forward with his forehead in his hand. When he finally looked up, his face was set.

"Yes," he agreed. "I think you have that right."

"That and nothing more," replied Barnes. "I don't want you to think that Eleanor herself has — has given me any encouragement in this."

"Not even — since you've come back?"

"I've not had time to exchange a half dozen words with her since then."

Langdon relapsed into silence and Barnes hurried on. He was very anxious to make himself clearly

understood. He did n't want Langdon to think he was taking an unfair advantage.

"Langdon," he said, "I 'm afraid I 'm not chivalrous enough to wish you success. It 's too serious a business for both of us. But I can say frankly that I want the girl to choose for her own happiness. And I don't see a pennyworth of difference between us. We are both artists; we are both honest; we have both, I should say, about the same amount of talent whatever that may count; we offer her about the same things. We 'd both buckle down to make her happy for all there is in us."

"I don't think women choose for those things," answered Langdon, dully.

"Nor I neither," agreed Barnes. "I don't know how they choose. Perhaps they don't choose at all. We hold out the straws and they draw. All is I want to put my straw in with yours, Langdon. I want a chance — because of all it means to me and my pictures."

Langdon rose wearily.

"There is n't much use discussing it," he said. "You 're right — devilish right."

Barnes hesitated about o ering his hand.

"We can't go ahead exactly as friends," he faltered, "but we need n't be enemies, need we?"

"No," answered Langdon. "But I don't think anything we ourselves may do consciously will play a very important part in the affair."

"Nor I either. So here 's my hand to a fellow artist anyway."

Langdon took it.

"I 'll see you off and on during the next few weeks I suppose," said Barnes, "but there 's no need of ever bringing this up again."

Langdon straightened himself.

"I did n't get your name," he observed with something of a smile.

"Barnes."

"Mr. Barnes, I ought to tell you that whatever formal engagement existed between Miss Van Patten and myself has already been canceled."

"Good Lord," exploded Barnes. "You mean —"

"That we found we had been over hasty. That is all. There has been no misunderstanding."

"But you —"

"I still mean to make her my wife if she concludes it is for her happiness. This new development may help her to decide."

"Why that 's great," exclaimed Barnes. "Then we 're both back on our mark."

"Yes," answered Langdon, grimly. "And I 'm going in now to telephone her."

"And I," concluded Barnes. "I guess I 'll go back to the house."

"Good-day, Barnes."

"Good-day, Langdon," answered Barnes.

And turning abruptly Barnes swung off down the road at as fast a pace as he could make.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PURPLE RIM

Langdon had mentioned thus casually a turn in the affairs of Eleanor hich to the girl herself marked a crisis. It is no small matter when one awakes to the realization that one does not understand oneself. And this is especially true when one's life hitherto has been as simple as the rule of three. Suddenly to discover that one is complex — to face in a flash the mystifying X in life's equations — is to grow from a girl to a woman in a minute.

That eventful morning a week ago when Carl had appeared to her pale-faced and looking like a wounded soldier and had made his sharp, fervent plea, she had answered out of a full heart and as to an old friend, "Yes." It came as a simple almost inevitable climax. It did not seem a momentous decision; it had involved no great fluttering of the heart. When she conveyed the news to Aunt Philomela, the latter had for a moment looked surprised, then thoughtful, and finally had solemnly

patted her hand with the remark, "Well, my dear, you will be safe with him at any rate."

For an hour after this she had lain prone upon the sofa pondering her aunt's observation. Yes, she would feel safe. Already she felt safe. She felt again, as she did as a little girl, that she was living in a cup bounded by the horizon line. What lay beyond did not concern her. There would be no adventuring over that purple rim. Should they ever venture forth, Carl would precede her like a courier and at every station have things ready for her comfort. Her life would move forward as steadily, as calmly as it now did.

It was at this point that Barnes had come in with the news of his intended departure. He had broken in upon her lazy reflections with his usual disconcerting impetuosity. And as usual, too, he had seemed to dash from over the horizon line. He had made her feel less as though this boundary were a protection. He had a way of swooping down from unexpected angles which was discomforting to one whose habit was to watch only the main thoroughfare. When Aunt Philomela in a moment of fretfulness had sputtered out before him the news of her engagement it had come to her distinctly as more of a surprise than when Carl himself had proposed. It was as though it were for the first time

announced to herself. It gave her a new sense of responsibility which left her feeling by no means so secure as before Barnes' entrance.

Then before she had time to think, Barnes had gone. Aunt Philomela drew her chair nearer and stroked her hair.

"He 's a queer boy," she murmured, "and somehow — I 'm going to miss him."

"He 's been very generous to us, Aunty," she answered.

Aunt Philomela sighed.

"But he is utterly irresponsible," she hedged.

Both women had a great deal with which to occupy themselves during the next few days but they moved always with a sense of insecurity. Carl came over often but there was not much he could do. In all little things he was thoughtful and he gave them both a great deal of good advice about not worrying and not overtaxing their strength.

So a week passed and Eleanor did not sleep well at night. Yet for the life of her she could not tell why. She had evil dreams about being stifled, about being tied hand and foot awaiting some awful doom. Once she called out so loudly in her sleep as to rouse Aunt Philomela. The latter crept in timidly with a frightened question on her lips,

"What is it, dearie?"

The girl reached out for her aunt's hand.

"Oh, I don't know," she groaned, "there seemed to be something —"

"A Thing?" interrupted Aunt Philomela.

"An uncanny thing."

Aunt Philomela recovered her spirit.

"You don't mean to tell me that Mr. Barnes —"

"Barnes?" interrupted the girl as though the name offered some vague explanation.

"Has he been filling your head full of that nonsense as he did John's?"

The girl smiled. The room seemed instantly as full of fresh air as though a window had been opened.

"No," she answered, "it is n't that. Get back into bed, Aunty, or you 'll catch cold."

Aunt Philomela reluctantly obeyed and the girl fell into a deep sleep which remained uninterrupted until dawn. Then she crept to the window. It seemed more like a sunset than a sunrise she was watching.

For the next day or two she used Carl abominably. It was impossible for her to see him. Yet he was very patient — very sweet. He wrote her quiet, tender little notes and spent most of his time downstairs with Aunt Philomela. The latter came up one evening with her face set.

"Eleanor," she snapped, "what I need is to get good and vexed once more."

"What do you mean, Aunty?"

"I mean I almost ordered Mary to spill some hot tea on Carl."

"You what?"

"I did," she continued uncompromisingly.

"If Mr. Barnes —"

"I wish to goodness he'd drop in for an hour this very evening."

Eleanor looked up brightly,

"It might clear the air," she suggested.

Aunt Philomela was thoughtful a moment. Then she observed, "I think in the morning you had better see Carl."

So the next morning she had received Carl. He was very solicitous as to what had caused her relapse and she, acting upon a sudden inspiration, tried to admit him into the secret of her thoughts.

"Carl," she said frankly, "I don't know what has come over me. Honestly I don't. But ever since our — our engagement I've felt stifled. It may be just hysteria. But I've felt all hemmed in."

He took her hand.

"I think I know what it is," he said tenderly. "You feel as though you had been made a prisoner?"

"Is it that?" she questioned eagerly.

"Yes. That is it," he decided. "Living here so much by yourself these last few years you 've been very free. But I don't want to feel that now I bind you in anyway."

"You don't. That 's what I can't understand." She frowned and then went on, "Why I 'm just as free as ever I was. I can move about as I wish; I can do what I choose. There 's nothing I wish to do that I can't do. I guess I 'm just silly."

Carl shook his head.

"When we 're gripped with an idea like yours, it is n't silly no matter how inexplicable it is."

"You know how I feel?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes," he answered, "you feel caged."

"Yes," she answered, "it 's that."

It was wonderful how fully he understood her. She felt even now when talking with him as though talking to herself.

"And you know how to cure me?" she asked with a little laugh.

He nodded.

"How?" she asked anxiously.

"By leaving the cage door open," he answered quickly. She caught her breath.

"You mean — ?"

"There is no need of our being formally engaged.

We can go on just as we have until we decide to get married —"

She drew back a little. He put in quickly, "We need n't even consider that now. We 'll be just friends until the whole matter solves itself."

"And it will solve itself?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes," he replied unhesitatingly.

She drew a deep breath. The cage door was even now open.

"Carl," she whispered honestly, "already I feel less afraid."

Thus what had appeared to her a very serious problem was settled in five minutes. And it left her not one whit more comfortable. As she thought of it during the day, the very fact of Carl's acquiescence piqued her. If the matter had been settled after a hearty quarrel she would have felt twice as free. As it was she was under obligations to his good nature if nothing else.

It was at this point that Carl began to lose weight; it was at this point that Eleanor began to realize that in some way Carl had for once misunderstood her. The discontent which oppressed her was by no means based upon such girlish hysteria as they had both supposed. But once at this conclusion she was no better able to analyze her condition than before. Her fretful nights began again and once again she

found herself straining towards something bigger and more intangible than had ever before come into her life. She still felt herself caged and this time it was by nothing less distant than the purple rim itself.

She did not discuss this with Carl. She did not mention it even to Aunt Philomela. Alone with herself in the dark she struggled to find meaning in it and as she struggled she discovered herself a wilder more irrational being than she had ever imagined existed.

For one thing her thoughts went back again and again to the saffron road. Until now this path had been significant only as furnishing a means of approach to the house or a convenient way of access to the green-grocer at the next village. But during the long nights which followed, it called to her in a more venturesome spirit. She saw it stretching mile upon mile beyond Chester, saw it winding through the valleys and up the hills and across mountain ranges to the sea. It did not stop even here. A big boat came down to meet her and carried her across the ocean where she again picked up the trail. She felt one with De Soto and Champlain; one with all those who press on through strange countries in their adventuring. And as she moved on she was upon wings and was unafraid.

Yet Barnes — Yes, it was Barnes who had shown her the way — had pointed out the dangers.

"My soul," he had exclaimed, "the dangers are innumerable and terrifying."

But now as she thought of them, she laughed back at him. He had spoken of chasms and glaciers and tangles and thorns and Indians. Well, what of them? She joyed at thought of pitting her strength of limb against them. She thrilled at prospect of scrambling over them and straight on. To what? It did not matter. She was in a state of primeval rebellion. She yearned to get beyond these flower-bordered paths, beyond these sheltered walls. Carl had left the cage open but in the meanwhile, even while beating her wings against the bars, she had found some new power. The cage door was open and she had no desire to hop back again among the flowers where before she had been content. She had seen the purple of the sky through the wires and now she hungered to soar.

Still it was all very vague. It was like a dream from which we awake with a distinct emotion of abstract horror or joy without being able to recall the details which cause the mood.

If, at times, Barnes intruded himself into the sacred mystery of these thoughts she then instantly regained control of herself. They were of too in-

timate stuff to share. He made her self-conscious. He made her uncomfortable.

Yet at other times she thought of him a great deal. She wondered about that tragedy in his eyes which Carl had pointed out to her. She had noticed it particularly the day Barnes had left. If ever a man's eyes expressed a secret woe, his did then. He had seen a great deal of the world and it would be small wonder if during that time he had met someone — someone —

She found it difficult to be more concrete. There were a great many different kinds of women and it would be very hard to visualize her whom such a man might choose. She might be tall or slight or dark or brunette or — she doubted if her appearance would matter very much to such a man. She might be gay or shy, learned or untutored, rich or poor. She doubted if any of those things would matter much to such a man.

It was impossible to conceive just what *would* matter but she was quite sure that whatever did, would matter a great deal. Love would be with him a big emotion and if it went wrong, it would be a big tragedy. Carl had seen it and she herself had caught traces of it in the letters he had written to her father. This week, with its problems, left her strangely eager for his return.

CHAPTER XXVI

AUNT PHILOMELA GAMBLES

Though Mr. Van Patten improved steadily during the week after Barnes' return, the old gentleman did not venture from his room. Joe remained daily by his side from morning until bedtime, with a view to establishing himself so firmly in his father's mind that if ever it became necessary to introduce Barnes in his proper person it would not be possible for the father to make comparisons. The possibility of such a contingency was really slight. The original deception had been practiced upon Mr. Van Patten's touch and hearing, and whatever discrepancies of evidence based on these might bob up would have little weight against what the father was now able to see for himself. As for contradictions in the narrative, the father's memory was weak and Barnes had appealed almost wholly to his emotions. It was really not until now that Mr. Van Patten had been able to fix his attention at all upon details.

Yet it was thought advisable not to let him know that a guest was in the house. This was no very

difficult matter and involved nothing but a certain amount of caution. Aunt Philomela, who had quite recovered her spirits, disapproved of it on general principles but admitted the wisdom of the course.

"I don't expect to see the end of this until I 'm in my grave," she avowed.

"Nor I," admitted Barnes.

"And I shall consider myself very lucky if I do then."

"And I —" Barnes paused. "Well, after all," he went on, "that depends upon how it all turns out."

Aunt Philomela looked at him curiously. She had looked at him curiously a great many times this last week. Barnes drew from his pocket a handful of loose matches. He began to arrange them with their heads in one direction.

"I have an embarrassment of riches," he observed.

"I 'm not sure that I like that new game you taught me," snapped Aunt Philomela.

"It helps one to forget the duets," suggested Barnes.

"You won most of those matches when you did n't have anything at all in your hand," commented Aunt Philomela.

"There is little skill in winning when you hold a Royal Straight Flush."

"I held four aces and even then you won."

"Because you did n't have the courage of your convictions," explained Barnes. "I had only a pair of deuces that time."

Aunt Philomela's eyes snapped dangerously.

"Then," she asserted, "I consider your gains decidedly ill gotten."

"If you had only called me."

"After you shoved forward a whole handful of matches as though you held all the cards in the pack?"

"That is the game. All is fair in love and —"

"Love!" snapped Aunt Philomela in disgust.

But she was interrupted in further comment by the entrance of Eleanor. She had often been interrupted in further comment this last week by the entrance of Eleanor.

The girl had regained her color at a wonderful rate these last few days. This may have been due to the rapid recovery her father was making, or it may have been due to the return of her brother and the good news he brought of 'The Lucky Find,' or it may have been due to Carl, who was noticeably assiduous in his attentions. Barnes spent a great deal of time trying to make out which it

was. Last night she had played duets with Carl until ten o'clock, while Barnes and Aunt Philomela sat at cards in the next room.

"Are you at liberty this morning?" inquired Barnes of Miss Van Patten.

"I don't know what Aunty has planned for me," she said dutifully.

"As though what I planned for anyone mattered," exploded Aunt Philomela.

"I'm sure," murmured Barnes, "that so far we have all of us followed your plans to the letter."

"So far?"

"From the beginning," nodded Barnes. "From the moment you sent me upstairs to see Mr. Van Patten."

"I? I sent you upstairs? I'm responsible for this whole affair?"

"But for your orders I should have gone on again along the saffron road."

"Well, of all the —"

But Eleanor effectively stifled her aunt's righteous indignation by putting her arms about the thin shoulders.

"There, Aunty, dear," she wheedled, "don't mind him. Now, I'll do anything you say. Do you wish me to help you with your accounts?"

"Or," put in Barnes, "do you wish us to catch you a fish?"

Aunt Philomela rose to her feet and swept grandly towards the door.

"A fish by all means," she answered.

At the door she paused and added:

"I have no doubt that Mr. Barnes will find it unnecessary to use even so much as a hook in his fishing."

She hurried out leaving the girl staring in amazement at Barnes.

"At cards last night," explained Barnes, "I won fifty-three sulphur matches from your Aunt — mostly by bluffing."

"Oh," she murmured in relief, "that explains it."

"You 'll come with me?"

She hesitated.

"The sun is almost too bright for fishing," she faltered.

"The sun is not too bright to go down by the brook," he asserted.

"But if we go, we shall have to fish," she exclaimed instantly.

"Very well," he agreed. "We will fish even if we catch nothing."

She went to the closet and brought out her big

hat, the fishing-poles, the book of flies, the basket, and, this time, the landing-net. At sight of it he drew a deep breath. It recalled to him his oath to the king trout. He must keep true to that no matter what complications it brought about.

And she, as she gathered the things together, grew uneasy. That, however, was nothing unusual. She could not recall a minute in his presence when she had ever felt anything else. One never knew what he was going to say next or what odd turn he would give the simplest platitudes of conversation. She felt much safer when Aunt Philomela was near except that even then he would generally contrive some argument that ended by involving them all. No — she could not honestly say that she was any the happier for having Aunt Philomela at hand. She could not say honestly that she did not now look forward to a morning with Barnes by the side of Schuyler brook. She anticipated it with a degree of pleasure that in itself was discomforting. She did not trust herself as she did three weeks ago.

In the meanwhile she had put on her hat and again succeeded in tying beneath her chin a most wonderful bow-knot.

"I haven't learned yet how to do that," commented Barnes.

"Do what?" she inquired, not recalling the former incident.

"Tie a bow-knot that will come untied when you wish."

"Have you practiced?"

"No," he admitted.

"Then?"

"I must still limit myself to tying such things as are my own."

"That is wisest," she agreed.

And without giving him time to base any embarrassing argument upon this, she led the way out of the little Dutch door. Here the Princess joined them. The big yellow cat had taken a fancy to Barnes of late and was to be seen quite as often in his company as in that of his mistress.

The girl forced a brisk path through the field-grass in as matter of fact a way as though in reality a fish for Aunt Philomela was the only thing in the world that concerned her. Lag as he might it did little good, and in no time they had reached the brook.

It was quite obvious to Barnes that the stream took no interest whatever in the affairs of the brick house from which it derived its name. Its business was solely with water-cress, white pebbles, and golden sand. It was whimpling on its

placid course just as unconcernedly as it did three weeks before. If Barnes expected any encouragement here for the deep matters he had in hand he was disappointed.

Eleanor proceeded at once to put her pole together and Barnes reluctantly followed. She paused as he handed her the fly-book.

"You had such good luck before —" she suggested.

"That," he answered, "was an especial occasion."

She selected a Silver Moth. As she turned away from him he replaced the fly-book in the basket, picked out a tiny bit of lead, and, fastening it to the end of his line, whipped it at once into the water. She glanced over her shoulder, surprised at the speed he had made, but she was too late to detect his choice. In another second her own fly was in the water and Barnes breathed more easily. Then he turned his attention to a more important matter.

"Eleanor," he began.

She looked up quickly. The name came to her fraught with new significance.

"Yes?" she answered.

"I think I have outlived my usefulness as a prodigal."

"The affair has solved itself in so simple a fashion that I had almost forgotten that part of it," she answered.

He looked up from his line. She was turned a little away. When she was standing there alone with him the matter seemed simple enough to be sure. It had from the beginning until Carl came in. The problem now was to find out just what had become of Carl.

"As far as your father is concerned it seems to have straightened out," he admitted.

"And as far as Joe is concerned," she added.

"And Aunt Philomela," he nodded.

"Yes," she agreed hastily.

He drew his line from the water and whipped it afresh across the stream.

"Which leaves," he concluded, "you and Carl and myself."

She dropped her fly below a clump of alders.

"Are you using a Silver Moth again?" she inquired.

"No," he confessed.

She followed the bobbing end of his line a second. He allowed it to sink below the water.

"I can't make out what you *have* chosen," she persisted, squinting her eyes.

"It 's a secret," he affirmed mysteriously.

"Oh, pardon me," she apologized, with some pique.

"Willingly," he murmured politely.

She seemed disposed to allow both subjects to drop but he with discomforting insistence reaffirmed,

"Which leaves you and Carl and myself."

"But you had a talk with Carl?"

"Yes."

"And though he seems hurt, it is straightened out as well as it can be, is n't it?"

"It is n't straightened out at all," he answered.

She turned uncomfortably so that she faced him. He met her eyes. She lowered hers. Then she smiled. It was her only protection.

"You 'll never catch a fish with your line in the bushes," she declared.

The current had swept the bit of lead down stream into a clump of grass. He deliberately began to reel in his line.

"I don't believe I 'll catch a fish anyway," he decided. "I 'll watch you."

"Oh, but that 's what you did before," she protested.

"And enjoyed it immensely," he admitted.

"It 's shirking your duties."

As his line left the water she studied him in surprise.

"Why, you didn't have on any hook at all," she exclaimed.

It was impossible to deny the fact in face of the evidence. Without answering he detached the sinker and continued to reel in his line. She allowed the Silver Moth to drift into the bushes. He called her attention to this and she grew very red in the face.

It was quite clear to her now that he had enticed her down here upon a pretext. She grew embarrassed out of all proportion to any import she saw in the ruse. She would have been glad if Aunt Philomela had come along.

"There is you and Carl and myself," he repeated, as though this were a sort of apology for his act.

She hastily reeled in her own line. The Princess watched her anxiously.

"Well?" she faltered.

Barnes took a step towards her. At that moment he heard the approach of someone from behind. He looked about.

"Why," he exclaimed, "here's Carl now!"

She almost dropped her pole.

"We're fishing," Barnes hastened to explain, in the hope of warding off the commonplace query which he thought he detected upon Carl's lips.

But the remark the latter made was anything but commonplace.

"I hurried down here to say good-by to you," he explained.

He uttered the words with an effort. They seemed no part of him. The process was purely mechanical.

"Good-by?" exclaimed the girl.

"I take the noon train," he announced. "From New York I sail to-morrow for Munich."

"But I don't understand!" cried the girl.

Carl turned from her to Barnes.

"Do you?" he demanded.

"Yes," answered Barnes.

"Then that is enough."

Barnes took a step forward and seized the boy's hand.

"I'd fight it out if I were you," he said below his breath.

"I'll fight it out in Munich," he answered grimly.

"Then God help you and — the songs."

Carl pressed the strong man's hand that held his.

"There's no need of praying for you," he answered.

Eleanor stepped forward in a daze.

"But Carl —" she faltered.

He seized her hand, gripped it for a second, and without a word started away.

"Carl," she called after him, "wait! We're going back to the house with you."

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH EVERYONE LEARNS SOMETHING

Twice now Eleanor had seen in a man's eyes the dumb pain of an unuttered tragedy, — once when Barnes had gone back to New York; again this afternoon, when Carl had bade her good-by and been driven off down the saffron road. In the first case she had played no part, though the ache of it still haunted her; in the second it was clear that she was the direct cause. And yet as she stood by the sitting-room window after supper and retraced this last summer, she saw nothing that she could have managed differently. Incident had followed incident with apparent inevitability. Of course she should have been surer of herself before giving Carl such encouragement, but under the circumstances of the moment she had acted with what wisdom she then had. The unrest, the doubts developing into certainty, had followed later.

But argue as she might, she was left with the feeling that she had been pitifully weak and was decidedly unworthy of the love which had been

offered her. She needed someone in whom to confide — someone to help her straighten out this tangle. Joe could not help, nor Aunt Philomela, nor even her father. She thought of just one man who might understand, and that one man was in the next room talking with her aunt. Even as she thought of him the one man entered and came across to her side. Whereupon she murmured an excuse and started to leave. But Barnes checked her.

"Don't go," he pleaded. "You 're worried."

He had touched her arm just the fraction of a second. She looked towards the door, startled. She felt very uncomfortable now that she was alone with the one man. Instead of clarifying matters, he seemed to complicate them.

"You take Carl's departure much to heart?" he asked.

"Because I feel very much at fault," she replied.

She was looking out the window across the rows of bright flowers, across the green fields, to the horizon line. To Barnes she appeared like a painting by Rossetti. With her head uplifted, her eyes half closed, as though in weary confusion, she looked like the Beata Beatrix.

"Because Carl loves you?" he asked suddenly.

She caught her breath. It sounded such a crude,

barbaric fact when he expressed it. She looked for some escape. She prayed that he might leave her alone. He stood before her as though barring her way.

"No! No!" she exclaimed. "He is mistaken."

"I do not think he is mistaken," he answered quietly.

He seemed bent upon depriving her of the one shred of hope to which she had been clinging. He made her feel even guiltier than before.

"Mr. Barnes," she pleaded, "let 's not talk of it any more."

"It 's the only way to settle things," he answered gently. "There 's no use of hiding our heads in the sand."

"But Carl has gone. It 's all settled."

"No," he answered deliberately. "It 's still very much mixed up for all of us. We can't help Carl very much except by admitting the truth, and that is that he loves you. He would have made beautiful songs for you if you had loved him."

"It 's cruel of you to make me feel so guilty," she protested.

"You misunderstand," he said gently. "His love was independent of anything you did consciously. You would have had to be other than yourself to have prevented that."

"I should have known myself better."

"We can't correct the past with what we learn, but the Future — there is where our wisdom counts."

"What will that count for Carl?" she exclaimed, with a queer little cry.

He thought a moment. Then he shook his head.

"I don't know," he answered. "I was thinking only of you."

"But I — I don't matter."

"One thing matters very much for you," he said.

"And that?" she asked anxiously.

"That you are now sure of yourself; that you are sure you do not really love him."

She started, but she did not reply. The stark sunlight which had been pounding hotly at the earth all day was now fading. The birds were getting sleepy.

It was at about this time of day that Barnes had first met her. Then she had been only a strikingly beautiful picture, and now — what a deal more she was to him now! Until this moment his love for her had seemed so big that it had been almost impersonal. Circumstances had forced him to regard it so. It had been almost like some of the big fine dreams he had dreamed about his Art.

Now, in a second, with that question, he felt her for the first time as a warm, palpitating, human being. As an artist he had admired her first, then as a mere man, then as a lover; but now, as he waited for her reply, it was as Richard Barnes that he loved her. For the first time he had to wrestle hard with himself for control. He hungered to feel her in his arms, to brush with his lips the scarlet in her cheeks, which was as rose upon ivory. He yearned to mingle kisses with the black of her hair, which had gold in it. He gathered himself together and repeated his question,

"You are sure of that?" he demanded.

There must have been some new quality to his voice, because she shrank back from him.

"I 'm not sure of anything," she stammered.

The one man frightened her. The one man now drove all thought of Carl out of her bewildered brain. The one man was in himself a yet keener problem than any she had so far had to face.

"Eleanor," he insisted, "that is one thing you must search your soul to answer."

"But why must I answer now?" she p rried.

"Because," he said quietly — "because if you love him I must wire him to-night on my way to Chester."

"You — you are going, too?"

The words fell from her lips unconsciously.

"If you wish me to bring back Carl," he answered.

"But I don't," she exclaimed. "It would n't do any good to bring him back."

She felt his hand upon her arm for the second time.

"You are sure of that?" he demanded.

"Yes. Yes. That is the pity of it."

"The pity of it," he answered soberly. Then again, "The pity of it."

"Don't you see," she hurried on, surer of her ground now, "I *ought* to love him. There is every reason why I should love him. And yet I don't. I can't."

She uttered the words as though it were a confession from which she expected Barnes to withdraw in horror. Leaning forward he searched her eyes as though once for all to penetrate the hidden gallery of her heart. She closed her eyes, frightened by his earnestness.

"You are sure of that?" he asked again.

She nodded guiltily.

"It 's a pitiful thing to say," she murmured, "but it 's true."

She held her breath to see what he would answer

to that. For what seemed to her an eternity he did n't say anything. When he did speak she was almost tempted into hysterical laughter. But she managed to control herself.

"Why, then," he said, "let 's go up on the hill back of the house."

She glanced into his blue eyes. When he led the way she followed. They went out by the little Dutch door and he closed it behind them. It was as though he closed a thousand doors behind her.

She stepped into the path, and it seemed to stretch in an endless vista beyond the top of the hill. She thought of De Soto and La Salle and Champlain, and knew how they must have felt as they turned their backs upon their home friends. And yet, so far as anything had been said, this was a simple venture to the top of a hill to view a sunset. All about her lay the nooks and crannies with which she had been so long familiar. She glanced back at the house. It had receded many miles. She was alone. That was what frightened her. The years before counted for nothing — her old friends counted for nothing. She felt like one daring for the first time into deep water without a supporting arm. And there was no shore back of her. She must go forward across the golden green waves, which sang in unreckoned miles,

leagues in front of her. She was alone. She had now only her own heart to guide her. All the tender souls who had ever stood about her might be eager, but they could give no answer to the questions which beset her suddenly on this simple venture to the top of a hill. Her mother, perhaps — but in the end even her mother must have been left behind.

Through the old garden they went, and the flowers smiled back at her. She plucked a half-folded poppy and grasped its stem as a child clings to a skirt. She stopped a moment to play with the others, but he said,

"Come."

So she went on again up the winding path which she had trod no later than yesterday. The hill loomed before her like one of those purple-capped piles she had seen in the sunset clouds. The sun caught her hair slantwise and brought out the gold in it.

"Are you tired?" he asked, as she lagged a little.

"No. Oh, no," she answered breathlessly.

She hurried to his side. There was nothing else to do. The path was blocked behind but it was wonderfully clear in front. Not so much as a cobweb barred her progress.

Upon the hill-top they found great banners of purple and gold waving before their eyes against a background of blue and green. Below them the verdure of the rolling fields and maple clumps were also tinted with gold. The air was soft, and yet it sparkled as though fine gold were being sifted down from above. A wonderful world, and they two stood alone in it. Populous cities subsiding their turmoil; men and women going about the ordinary routine of their lives; ships putting to sea and men being carried to hospitals — all those things there might be for others outside the circumference of their eyes, but to them mere phantasies, pleasant and unpleasant. They stood alone here and the fact of grappling kingdoms and great deeds elsewhere were but the tawdriest distant incidents.

Before their eyes the colors strutted the skies like vain peacocks showing their plumage. But always, whether the dye was of crimson or green or purple or the lightest shade of old rose, the gold shone through it to quicken. It was as though the theme were gold. It came as a prelude. It ran triumphant through every movement, and in the el. it controlled the tinted postlude which softened imperceptibly into the golden blue of the finale.

With this her thoughts grew more restful. She no longer felt afraid though still she stood alone. He was speaking.

"Do you remember," he asked gently, "what I told you about the true adventurers?"

"About the little children?" she answered nodding.

"And about the lovers?" he added.

"Yes," she was forced to admit.

He had spoken of the dangers in a way that had frightened her. Looking down upon this same scene he had pointed them all out to her. And yet now it was difficult to grasp them.

"When two go adventuring hand in hand the dangers are halved," he said.

It was as though he had answered her unspoken thought.

"Then," he added, "they are halved again and then halved once more until they are all gone."

Her eyes had grown distant. Her breath was coming in little gasps. The true explanation of these last weeks came in upon her now. Twice she had seen in a man's eyes the dumb pain of an unuttered tragedy, but now she remembered only the first time, — when the one man had left her to go back to New York. In sudden fear she turned to see if any trace of the pain were still

there. She found herself looking into blue eyes which were as quick with fine gold as the sky itself. They made her dizzy. She tottered. Then she felt herself in the grasp of strong arms.

"Into the West," he murmured, "straight into the West, my own."

Her head dropped to his shoulder. She was trembling, and once again he heard the plaintive little sound he had heard by the letter-box. In amazement he tried to lift her head, but with a sob she only burrowed it deeper. So he kissed her hair and patted her very gently and waited.

Whether it was one minute later or one year later that Barnes heard her voice he could not have told. He was way off beyond the horizon line when he caught her broken statement.

"I sha' n't lift my head until — until it 's dark."

The statement did not seem to disturb him. He kissed her hair.

"I 'm very stupid," she gasped.

He kissed her hair again.

"And very weak," she murmured.

He kissed her hair once more.

"And — and altogether unworthy of you."

Whereupon he took her head in his hands and held it back. Her eyes were tight closed.

"Eleanor," he called.

"No! No! No!" she pleaded.

He brought his lips to hers. For a second she allowed it so. Then she opened her eyes wide — very, very wide.

"Dear you," he breathed. "We have started on the Great Adventure."

Then, for the first time, she saw a man's face glorified.

"Come," he said, "we must go back to Aunt Philomela."

Her heart fell and all the way down the hill she clung to his arm. Every now and then he stopped and looked deep into her eyes. He made her very uncomfortable; deliriously uncomfortable.

Aunt Philomela was waiting for them in the sitting-room. When they entered she glanced up as sharply as she had the day Barnes had first made his entrance. The girl drew back and waited for Barnes to speak. He said nothing. She was sure her face was red and that her hair was in disorder.

"Well?" demanded Aunt Philomela.

With a quick little run the girl threw herself on her knees by her aunt's side and buried her face in her lap. Barnes waited. Aunt Philomela's black eyes grew dangerous.

"Well?" she demanded again.

"Oh, Aunty," cried the girl, "can't — can't you see?"

For a moment Aunt Philomela stared at Barnes. Then she stooped and kissed the girl's head.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "I see. I saw long ago."

THE END